DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 160 037 HE 010 512

TITLE	The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program. Five Years of Experience: A Study.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities, Springfield.
PUB DATE	Jun 78
NOTE	93p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities, 544 Iles Park Place, Springfield, Illinois 62718
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$4.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Students; *Bachelors Degrees; *College Cooperation; Educational Assessment; Experiential Learning; *External Degree Programs; Followup Studies; Higher Education; Interinstitutional Cooperation; Nontraditional Students; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Special Degree Programs; State Universities; *Statewide Planning; Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	Chicago State University IL; Eastern Illinois University; Governors State University IL; *Illinois; Northeastern Illinois University; Student Outcomes; Western Illinois University

ABSTRACT

A comprehensive study was undertaken of the effectiveness of an external degree program implemented in Illinois to meet the needs of adult students studying for the Bachelor's degree. The rationale, history, structure, administration, and governance of the statewide program offered through five universities are described. The majority of students in the program are beyond the traditional age for attending college, and minority groups, especially blacks, are well represented. The younger adults are predominantly male, while women are better represented among older students. Most of the students have attended several colleges and universities and enjoy the unlimited opportunity to apply these credits toward a degree. The flexible degree design enables adults to select courses and fields of specialization suited to their professional guidelines specifying the procedures for admission, transfer of credit, classes, fees, and graduation requirements have been successfully implemented in all five campuses. Information is provided on student characteristics, the assessment of prior learning, academic programs and educational background of students, and evaluation of graduates. Recommendations are offered based on the five years of operation, in which more than 6,000 students have been enrolled and an excess of 1,500 have graduated from the program. (SW)

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THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS Bachelor of Arts Degree Program

5 Years of Experience: A Study

Board of Governors & State Colleges & Universities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Early in 1973 the Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities embarked on a bold educational experiment with far-reaching implications for the universities it governs, for the citizens of Illinois, and for higher education across the country. The objective of the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program was to provide adult students with an opportunity to earn an undergraduate degree in a manner compatible with their needs and lifestyles. The resources of five universities spread across the state were to be mobilized in meeting this challenge, and as many innovative instructional and evaluative techniques were to be incorporated into the degree structure as possible. The venture, like any experiment, was laden with risk. The viability of such an innovative approach to the baccalaureate degree was uncertain. If it proved successful, however, the model could open higher education to a new clientele and demonstrate new ways by which colleges and universities could serve the public.

Now, five years later, sufficient time has passed to assess the extent to which the Board of Governors Degree Program has met the objectives for which it was established. Almost 6,000 students have enrolled in the program, and over 1,500 have been graduated. Numbers alone, however, do not suffice to measure the effectiveness of an academic program. Who are these students? How successfully has the BOG program provided them with the educational opportunities they need and want? To what degree has the BOG program operated on a systemwide basis

rather than as five distinct programs? Uniting five separate institutions into a single cohesive unit poses immense organizational and administrative problems. Have they been overcome? What of innovation? Have the concepts of open admissions and the "no fail" policy increased access to higher education without lowering academic standards? The provisions enabling adults to utilize credit from a variety of educational institutions, to design individualized academic programs, and to receive credit for prior learning through life and/or work experience stimulated discussion and controversy because they broke traditional academic taboos. How well have these provisions worked, and how might they be improved? In short, has the BOG program lived up to the high expectations of those who inaugurated it half a decade ago?

To find the answers to these questions, a comprehensive self-study was initiated in the summer of 1977. Questionnaires completed by students upon admission to the program provided demographic information and indications of students' motivations for enrolling. Data has also been accumulated on credit awards for experiential learning, course work transferred from other universities, classes taken at BOG institutions, and degree completion time. In addition, a special survey invited all graduates through the spring of 1977 to evaluate their experience and appraise the program's value to themselves and their employers. To measure the extent to which the program has been administered uniformly at all five institutions, the campus Coordinators completed a lengthy questionnaire and discussed it in detail with the self-study consultant. A meeting

at each university brought together the Chairperson of the Steering Committee for the program, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the BOG Coordinator and other staff, faculty members who had served on advisory committees and who had evaluated student portfolios, graduates of the program, and current enrollees. These discussions included both the broad outlines and key aspects of the program, with those in attendance providing insightful comments and suggestions.

At the time the BOG program began, few colleges or universities provided adults with effective opportunities to complete an undergraduate degree. No model existed which could have been replicated in Illinois. Clearly, new ground was to be broken and risks had to be taken. An alternate strategy would have been to postpone the inauguration of a program until all the issues and problems had been thoroughly analyzed and the details fully worked out. The Board of Governors, however, preferred action and commitment over prolonged study and debate. No one claimed to have designed a perfect program; improvements and corrections, everyone recognized, would be necessary as the program developed. The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program should, therefore, be evaluated in light of what it has attempted and not against some abstract standard of perfection.

HISTORY AND RATIONALE

In the early 1970's American post-secondary education was oriented almost exclusively to serve students in the 17 to 23-year age group. Returning military veterans, the only noticeable group of distinctively older students, were usually only a few years older

than the typical college student. Moreover, most undergraduate coursework was provided during daytime hours on weekdays. Enrollment pressures created by the post-war baby boom denied college planners and administrators the opportunity to consider enlarging their program offerings to encompass a broader range of students. As a result of many social, political, and fiscal forces, the educational needs of large numbers of potential adult students were largely neglected.

Substantial problems faced adults whose work and family responsibilities either precluded enrollment in traditional undergraduate degree programs or made it so extraordinarily difficult that it was beyond the range of even dedicated adults who yearned for further college education. Potential adult students often saw colleges as inhospitable or even hostile places for people like themselves. Moreover, a variety of rules and practices unduly complicated degree completion. Every institution had developed regulations regarding transfer of credit, admission and readmission, dual-enrollment and time limits. As long as the college population was predominantly late adolescent or young adult, such rules posed no great difficulty. What was not generally perceived was that these practices severely militated against potential adult students.

The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program grew out of a social and intellectual climate which encouraged new approaches to post-secondary learning which could alleviate injustice and discrimination of all kinds. The civil rights movement stimulated

a recognition that many segments of the population--especially Blacks, Latinos, women, and those beyond the traditional "college age"--had been largely excluded from higher education. Moreover, campus turmoil during the 1960's prompted college teachers and administrators to recognize that the quality of education could be enhanced by the presence of a greater variety of students.

Three prominent commissions during the early 1970's focused on the need for curricular and administrative change. Dr. Clark Kerr chaired a Carnegie Commission on Higher Education which suggested "improvements in the approach, content, and structure of higher education" to make it "more advantageous to many individuals and more useful to society." The Commission encouraged the development of programs making it easier for students to "stop out" from college or to alternate periods of employment and study. It argued that adults should be able to enter and re-enter college throughout their lives. "Higher education," the report emphasized, "is now prejudiced against older students. They should be welcomed instead."[1]

A second committee, chaired by Stanford educator Dr. Frank Newman, prepared a Report on Higher Education for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare which struck similar themes. The Newman Commission condemned the "arbitary restriction" and lack of imaginative program design which limited the "opportunities for those of beyond college age and of those for whom attendance at a conventional campus is impossible." Attendance at universities could no longer be limited to individuals in their late teens or early twenties; barriers to entry and re-entry had to be

eliminated. Technology had to be utilized to provide expanded access. Foreign models had proven what could be done, and excellent materials were available; "only the imagination and commitment are as yet lacking in the United States."[2]

Samuel B. Gould's Commission on Non-Traditional Study went further than its predecessors in urging that what adults learned during their lives deserved recognition. Ways should be developed, the Commission recommended, for awarding them appropriate credit for learning; whole new degree programs suited to the special needs of older students should be developed. "Education to meet our needs," summarized Gould, is "everyone's goal. We should work toward it enthusiastically, with a sense of commitment and with confidence that there are good and valid ways to address it, ways that do not lessen quality even if they are different from traditional standards."[3]

In Illinois, no less than elsewhere in the nation, educational leaders sought workable solutions to these problems. The Illinois Board of Higher Education's Master Plan--Phase III, approved in May 1971, emphasized the importance of inter-institutional cooperation in calling for "collective projects, collaborative enterprise, better utilization of resources, consortia, and complementary development among all of Illinois colleges and universities."[4] Some states, notably New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota, created new agencies or universities to administer innovative programs for older or part-time students.

Such reports and recommendations stimulated the Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities to begin developing ways of responding to the needs for innovative, adult degree programs. Its system of

five institutions--Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Northeastern Illinois University and Western Illinois University--encompassed both urban and rural settings. These universities provided a convenient, logical network for a cooperative educational venture. Moreover, the BOG system had traditionally responded to public need and showed a willingness to encourage innovative, even venturesome, curricular experiments. Specific discussion of new program possibilities began in March, 1972 when the Board's Associate Executive Officer, Dr. Robert A. Pringle, met with representatives from each BOG university to consider "how the regular undergraduate programs might better serve their constituency through more flexible administration." Their talks stimulated creative thinking on ways the strengths of the five universities could be maximized to meet the needs of adult learners.

Those present at this and subsequent meetings of that group realized that to be successful such an innovative program must confront the problems of earning a college degree in a rapidly changing society. Because technology created jobs and then rapidly made them obsolete, education was a continuing need, especially for individuals who wanted to move into new or more responsible positions. Moreover, adults were transferred from one city or state to another with such frequency that maintaining ties to a single institution was difficult or even impossible. Traditional residency requirements posed an insurmountable barrier. Provisions were also needed whereby adults could receive credit for

what they had learned outside of formal academic settings. While a rigid curricular structure might be appropriate for most younger students, it was assumed that adults could take the responsibility for developing an appropriate academic program for themselves.

The planning committee concluded that a new degree program available at all five BOG universities and tailored to meet the special needs of adult learners offered the greatest potential. It could be flexible, including departures from traditional admissions requirements, modes of instruction and transfer of credit. Committee members wanted a program which maintained high academic standards which at the same time reduced or eliminated unnecessary requirements which hindered older persons from completing college degrees. Meetings involving admissions personnel, registrars, faculty and administrators from the various campuses during the spring and early summer added details to the original conceptual framework.

On July 13, 1972, a formal proposal was ready for submission to the Board of Governors. The Board unanimously approved the program for forwarding to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. This Board granted its approval on October, 3, 1972, after considerable discussion among staff members of the two Boards. Within a short time Coordinators were appointed on each campus, a systemwide Steering Committee was implemented to coordinate the program at five campuses, and before the year's end, students had been admitted to the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program.

CONCEPT AND STRUCTURE

The proposal approved by the Board of Governors and the Illinois Board of Higher Education created a degree program specifically designed to operate systemwide and to remove obstacles which discouraged adults from completing undergraduate degree programs. To assure that the program operated as uniformly as possible at the five universities, a Steering Committee composed of the Vice President for Academic Affairs from each campus, a faculty representative from the System Council of Faculties and the Associate Executive Officer was charged with developing and, when desirable, amending regulations for the program's operation.

A fundamental concept embodied in the original guidelines and refined in later modifications required treatment of the adult student as an adult. The assumption, consciously made, was that typical BOG students would be more mature, serious, highly motivated, and clear about academic goals than is generally the case with younger persons. They were expected to assume greater responsibility for their own education than is customary in other degree programs. The degree structure was, therefore, flexible. Consequently, the BOG program relies less on close monitoring or extrinsic control and more on students' desires for a program which meets their needs. Time for working adults is scarce and precious; they are unlikely to waste it on frivolous activities. Employed persons recognize the need to acquire or improve specific skills and to enlarge their knowledge for personal enrichment or career enhancement.

The guidelines provide for the admission of all applicants into the program. Most are adults, although no specific age limit has been established and a few relatively young persons have enrolled. The utilization of standardized entrance examinations, high school grades, and class standing reports was abandoned because of the belief that such measurement devices are often irrelevant for older students. Persons without a high school diploma or G.E.D. certificate can be admitted by special permission, although this provision has been used infrequently. The planners believed that admissions standards bearing little relationship to an individual's chances for success should be eliminated for adult students. One restriction prohibited persons who had been academically dismissed from a college or university from transferring into the BOG program for six months; this has been modified to apply only to individuals within 30 hours of graduation at BOG universities. No one holding a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution can be admitted.

Unlike other innovative programs such as the University Without Walls, the University of Oklahoma's Bachelor of Liberal Studies, and competency-based degrees, the BOG program bases its graduation requirements on the completion of 120 semester hours of credit, a number commonly accepted in higher education. The committee which planned the degree believed that adults need a broad background in the humanities, social sciences, and natural science or mathematics to function in a modern society and thus required that each graduate accumulate at

least 12 semester hours in each of these three areas. Cooperative endeavors with community colleges are encouraged by a provision that any student who completes an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science Degree from a community college has met this requirement. A bachelor's degree should also include a substantial portion of advanced specialized knowledge of the kind usually provided to students in their last two years, thus each BOG degree graduate is required to have at least 40 semester hours of credit at the upper division level. To meet state requirements, all graduates must have passed a test on the Illinois and United States Constitutions or have completed equivalent institutional requirements.

The committee recognized that often the nature and content of an academic major are artificial or arbitrary. Younger students may need the discipline of focusing their education largely in a single, circumscribed field, but adults, aware of their career goals and educational needs, may find the requirements for many majors too confining. An interdisciplinary specialization or no major at all may be more appropriate. BOG students are given two options: those who wish to complete the requirements for an approved institutional major may do so; others may wish to individualize their programs by combining credits from several disciplines or academic units without completing a formal major.

What makes the Board of Governors program unique and attractive to many adult learners is not its structure, which is relatively traditional by comparison with many innovative programs, but the

flexibility which students have in meeting the requirements. Most adults want an academically sound, widely acceptable program, but they also demand that arbitrary and meaningless regulations, which restrict degree completion while adding no quality, be eliminated. The BOG program attempts to accomplish these objectives.

The BOG degree requirements recognize that in a mobile society where hundreds of high-quality educational institutions operate, an adult may earn credits at a variety of accredited institutions. Why not recognize this fact and encourage students to utilize courses taken at three, seven, or even a dozen accredited colleges and universities? This is possible within the BOG Degree. Moreover, the requirement that a certain large number of credits be earned at the end of one's program, in residence on a college campus, discriminates against many older, part-time students whose careers frequently make it impossible for them to stay long enough in one place to complete traditional residency requirements. While there is a requirement that 15 semester hours be earned at one or a combination of BOG universities, students in the BOG program have the opportunity to transfer an unlimited number of courses from other accredited institutions. Moreover, time restraints have been eliminated: courses can be taken at other institutions prior to or after admission to the BOG program; the required BOG-sponsored courses can be completed at any point during the student's academic career; there are no time limits for completing the degree. No distinction is made between on- and off-campus classes, and the requirements may also be met by taking independent study or acceptable media courses. Once admitted

to the program at one BOG school, students can readily transfer to other BOG universities and enjoy equal access to courses. Many adults find that this structure makes it possible for them to "put it all together" through the BOG program. The assurance that credits earned in accredited institutions will be accepted without question is psychologically reassuring to returning adult students.

Only passing grades are recorded for courses taken at BOG institutions. Adults may receive failing grades because of situations entirely beyond their control. Family needs or vocational demands must sometimes take precedence over college studies. A sick child, an unexpected office meeting, or an unavoidable trip may prevent an adult student from completing an assignment, taking a final exam, or meeting some other academic requirement. This policy is designed to credit success without punishing failure, another psychological benefit to students who have doubts about their own abilities. It is theoretically possible for poorly qualified or motivated persons to take advantage of such a regulation; to some extent it rewards persistence as much as academic distinction, and makes it possible for most persons to finish a degree eventually. It is not surprising that this provision has evoked considerable discussion.

Many adults have acquired knowledge or skills during their lives through individual study, on-the-job training, or non-collegiate instruction which approximate what can be learned at a college or university. The BOG program provides such persons with an opportunity to receive academic credit for what they have learned. Students are encouraged to take the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Proficiency Examination Program (PEP)

tests as well as other tests developed by the Armed Forces. The American Council on Education's recommendations are utilized to award credit for military training courses. And, it is possible for students to take proficiency examinations for some courses on each campus. Students may submit individual portfolios describing and documenting their prior learning for evaluation by faculty members and other experts. Credits can then be awarded on the basis of demonstrated knowledge. No ceiling is set on the number of hours which may be earned through these nonconventional means. Because this is such an important and innovative aspect of the BOG program, a more extended discussion of the procedures which have been utilized and the credits which have been awarded for nonacademic experience is included later in this report.

Each student selects one BOG university to sponsor his or her degree. Usually it is the school where the student originally enrolls and takes most courses, although this is not a requirement. The Program Coordinator at the sponsoring university has the responsibility of reviewing the student's records and certifying to the Vice President for Academic Affairs that all degree requirements have been met. Transcripts indicate that the student has been enrolled in the BOG program, and the diploma indicates that the degree was awarded by the Board of Governors on the recommendation of the sponsoring institution.

SYSTEMWIDE ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

Coordinating the activities of five separate universities united in a single academic venture has required the development of a special system of administration and governance for the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program. The major responsibility for developing operational guidelines and monitoring their administration is taken by the BOG Program Steering Committee, which consists of the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs from each BOG university, an elected representative from the systemwide Council of Faculties, and the Deputy Executive Director for Academic Affairs from the Board of Governors System Office, who serves as chairman. The chief concerns of the Steering Committee have been to draft guidelines for the program's operation and to assure that high academic standards are maintained while flexibility is preserved.

The Steering Committee prepared administrative guidelines before the program accepted the first students and has since adopted amendments as need arose. Sections of the guidelines which deal with admissions procedures, fees, credits, courses, transcripts, the assessment of nonacademic experience, and the functions of the Program Coordinators create a framework within which the program operates. Most are phrased in general terms, and, therefore, are flexible rather than restrictive. Each campus has slightly different ways of handling admissions, registration, the preparation of transcripts, graduation, and other administrative matters. It is neither expected nor possible to guarantee identical precedures everywhere. Continuous and on-going consultations among

the Coordinators, the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs, and the Deputy Executive Director solve emerging problems, however, and assure reasonable uniformity throughout the system.

Steering Committee members have made certain that the BOG program maintains high academic standards. It was designed to serve a new clientele, rather than to make a degree easily available to unqualified individuals. Committee members were concerned, for example, that younger people unable to meet the academic standards of other programs would utilize the open admissions provisions to enroll in the BOG program or that some students would try to circumvent departmental or campus requirements by transferring into the BOG program. The program was not established to serve such individuals, everyone agreed; but how could they be prevented from taking advantage of the program without creating restrictive regulations which would simultaneously do an injustice to others for whom the program was suited? One solution offered was to require anyone who had been academically dismissed from a college or university to wait six months before entering the BOG program. Others suggested setting a minimum age limit--24 or 25, for instance--for admissions. Any age would be arbitrary, however, and might work a hardship on some, especially since in our society persons of almost any age work full-time and have family responsibilities. After lengthy discussions involving the Steering Committee and the Coordinators, a guideline was adopted in mid-1976 to prohibit any student at a Board of Governors university who is within 30 hours of graduation and not in good academic standing from transferring to the BOG program until he or she has been out of school for six months.

Steering Committee members also debated the need for BOG students to attain a minimum grade point average in order to graduate. The Committee agreed that the standard generally used for campus programs suited the BOG program as well, and required that students earn a grade-point average of 2.0 (C) prior to graduation.

The Steering Committee and the Coordinators have devoted considerable effort to making it possible for BOG graduates to secure state teaching certificates. When the program was first developed, officials at the Illinois Office of Education and the Chicago Board of Education agreed that its graduates could be certified either by completing an approved institutional program or by having their transcripts evaluated on an individual basis. Credit in all areas except student teaching could be granted for prior learning. A problem resulted because many approved campus programs were too restrictive for adult, part-time students, and some Colleges of Education were reluctant to admit BOG students to their classes or to provide them with student teaching opportunities. The Committee is working to resolve these problems.

Awarding credit for prior life and/or work experience is another topic of concern to the Steering Committee. The Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs review each credit award and

are aware both of the value of recognizing prior learning and of the possible pitfalls in implementing such procedures. The Steering Committee recognizes the need for vigilance to assure that assessment is carefully and responsibly conducted and encourages the development of materials to help students prepare better portfolios and for faculty members to assess them. The Vice Presidents recently endorsed the participation of all five BOG universities in a Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) institutional development project to improve and expand the utilization of experience in higher education.

Some problems related to awarding credit for prior learning can be remedied by the establishment of standard awards of credit for uniform training experience. Soon after the program began the Steering Committee, recognizing that registered nurses who had completed hospital training programs were often unable to apply any of their credits toward a bachelor's degree, approved granting a minimum of 45 semester hours of credit to these certified RNs. Both the Coordinators and the Steering Committee have discussed the possibility of adopting block awards for other certificates, but this topic is still under discussion.

The Steering Committee worked with the Board staff to request and distribute funds for the BOG Program. Because the program

was operated during its first 18 months without new funds, each institution reallocated existing resources to employ a Coordinator, and a $30.00 fee collected for evaluating prior experience was utilized to help meet program expenses. As the number of students in the program grew, the Board staff submitted budget requests to the Board of Higher Education which recommended funds be appropriated for the program. In FY75 $18,000 was added to each university's base budget to help support the program. (see Table 1).

Table 1

ESTIMATED AMOUNTS EXPENDED ON THE BOG PROGRAM

	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU
FY73	$ 5,805	$ 10,774	$ 9,786	$ 4,200	$ 2,281
FY74	17,730	18,983	18,064	19,280	5,250
FY75	26,500	20,288	29,058	37,280	17,760
FY76	45,907	40,289	46,069	66,889	44,898
FY77	57,617	55,902	54,504	66,889	52,533
Total	$153,559	$146,236	$157,481	$194,538	$122,722

In succeeding fiscal years funds were also distributed to the campuses using a formula which included a uniform base amount for each university plus additional amounts depending on enrollment or special need. As the program grew, each campus assumed responsibility for submitting its own request for additional funding. In most instances, the universities have allocated existing funds to support the operation of the program.

In addition to formal meetings of the Steering Committee and conferences among the Coordinators, informal discussions have proved valuable in solving the problems associated with administering a systemwide program. It is not uncommon for a Coordinator to call the System Office or one of the other Coordinators to ask for advice in handling a problem. A call from the Deputy Executive Director to a Vice President, a Coordinator, or any other university official can be helpful in dealing with troublesome situations. This informal process that has become so natural is vital in maintaining systemwide consistency and in utilizing the varying and specialized talents of all the Coordinators.

Experience has shown both the strengths and weaknesses of the procedures developed to administer the Board of Governors Degree Program. The need for written guidelines has been demonstrated, although the distinction between regulations which are over-restrictive and those which are too vague to be implemented is narrow and requires continual assessment and appropriate modification. The close personal association of the highest academic officials at each campus and systemwide has been very important, especially during the early development and implementation of the program. Their participation has virtually guaranteed institutional support and has assured fairly consistent compliance with the guidelines. Service on the Steering Committee, however, requires a great deal of time from persons with many other responsibilities.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPANSION

Students admitted to the Board of Governors program work directly with the office of the Coordinator at the university of their choice. At Chicago State University, Dr. Charles N. Somers, Director of Educational Experimentation, was the first Coordinator, succeeded by Dean Leslie Ollie on an interim basis. Joan Hill, a sociologist, has been the Coordinator since the summer of 1975. Dr. Donald Tingley, a Professor of History, has served at Eastern Illinois University since the inception of the program. Dr. Dixon Bush, the first Coordinator at Governors State, was Director of Cooperative Education and Dr. Elizabeth C. Stanley, an analytical chemist, has been Coordinator of the BOG program since 1973. Northeastern Illinois University chose Mr. William Moore, Director of Program Development, as its first Coordinator. Dr. C. Edward Gilpatric, a political scientist, succeeded Mr. Moore, and Dr. Bettye Parker, a specialist in Afro-American and African Literature, is the current Coordinator. Mr. William Ramsey, a transcript examiner in the Western Illinois University Admissions Office, coordinated the BOG program until mid-1976, when Dr. Lawrence Murphy, a historian, assumed the task.

Because the BOG program was new and innovative, it was not known where it would best fit within the university structure nor how much of a Coordinator's time would be needed. At first the program was assigned to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. As the program developed, changes in administrative organization have occurred to reflect different institutional patterns. Today the

Coordinator reports to the Dean of Special Programs, Director of a Center for Program Development, or the Dean of Continuing Education as well as the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

In retrospect, it is difficult to believe that in the beginning some felt that the BOG program would be small and grow slowly. New funds were unavailable to add personnel and, at first, most Coordinators worked with the program on a part-time basis. As enrollments and budgetary support have grown, they have devoted full time to administering the program, and clerical assistants, counselors, and other staff members have been added to most BOG offices on a minimal basis.

The Coordinators have broad responsibilities for administering the program on each campus, including public information, student counseling, portfolio processing, and graduation approval. They undertake whatever promotional activity is done, frequently using materials prepared by the System Office in Springfield. Adults considering applying for admission to the program communicate individually with the Coordinator or the counseling staff or attend prospective-student meetings. The Coordinator's office provides special counseling and advising desired by older students adjusting to a college environment. Assistance is also provided in planning academic programs and preparing portfolios describing the students' prior learning. In some cases printed materials, forms, and newsletters have been prepared to aid these students.

Much advising is conducted individually or in small groups. This is expensive, and funds have never been adequate to provide a full complement of student services.

At some campuses evaluation of transcripts from other colleges, categorizing courses according to BOG requirements, and certifying students for graduation is delegated to personnel in the university Registrar's Office. In other cases, these activities are conducted by people in the Board of Governors program office. Several universities have established faculty committees to advise the Coordinator on academic questions, to recommend operational policies or guidelines, and to review credit recommendations for portfolios which have been assessed by faculty members or other experts.

The focus of the program varies at each university, depending on location, community needs, and the Coordinator's interest. In the Chicago metropolitan area, numerous colleges and universities offer classes, many of them in the evening and on weekends. Getting to a campus is not generally difficult for adult students. What is lacking for this age group are programs attuned to adult needs, allowing the utilization of credits from a variety of sources, and providing ways by which credit can be awarded for nonacademic learning. The BOG program fulfills these needs. Chicago State has been especially responsive to minorities and the economically disadvantaged who desire educational advancement. Northeastern has served the large population areas on the north and northwest

sides of the city and in the suburbs. As an upper division and graduate institution established to provide educational alternatives, Governors State utilizes several features of the BOG program in other aspects of its curriculum and has often lent its special expertise and training abilities to other campuses, especially in the evaluation of experiential learning. Since students admitted to GSU must have earned sixty hours either at another college or through the assessment of prior learning, somewhat different admissions procedures are utilized than elsewhere.

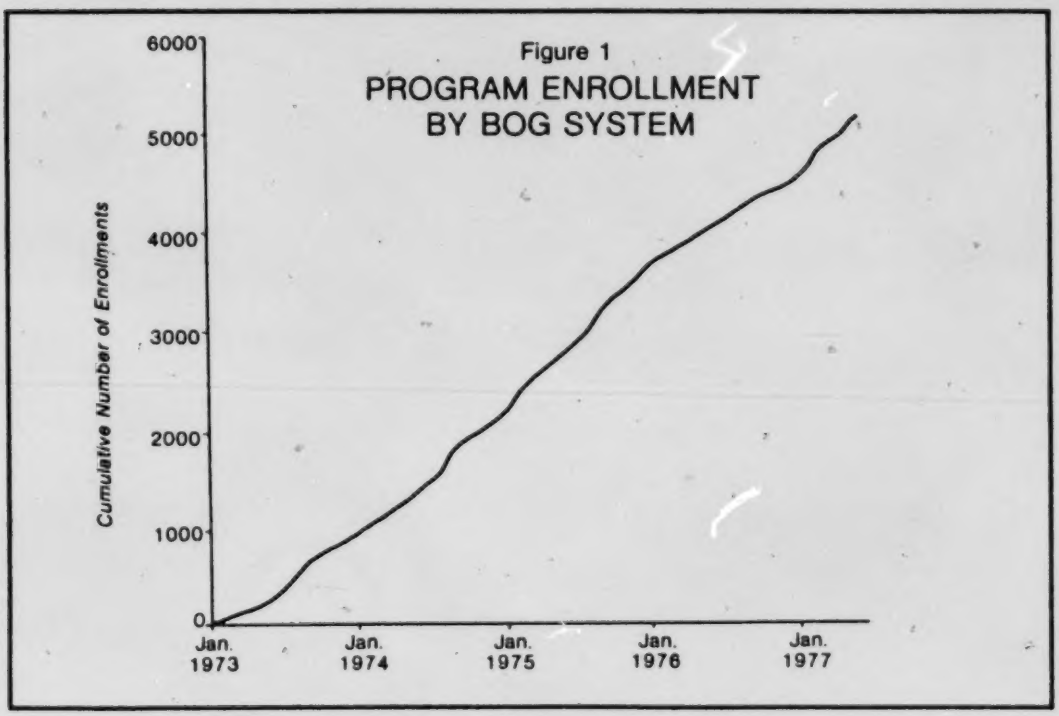
Each Chicago-area school has developed activities designed to help individuals in certain identified groups complete a degree. Public service employees at the Federal Regional College in downtown Chicago, for example, have utilized the BOG program, as have Federal Aviation Administration staff members near O'Hare Airport, state mental health workers at Elgin State Hospital in Des Plaines, and Naval personnel at Glenview Air Station. Large numbers of law enforcement officers, nurses, trade school instructors, drug treatment counselors, and para-professional social and health care agency personnel have enrolled for the program. Chicago State University has worked cooperatively with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Bankers Life and Casualty Company, Illinois Bell Telephone, and the Chicago Public Schools in providing information and counseling for persons interested in completing a BOG Degree. The program has also enabled many women seeking to enter or re-enter the job market to acquire new skills, refresh their knowledge, or secure necessary credentials.

While adult students downstate have many of the same needs as those in the Chicago area, they encounter added obstacles due to their geographic location. Employed adults living far from a campus often find it impossible to accumulate the required on-campus residential hours. The problem is compounded because most downstate institutions have been oriented toward younger, full-time residential students and have offered relatively few, if any, undergraduate courses off-campus or in the evening. The Coordinators at Eastern and Western have used the BOG program to provide individuals residing in areas not served by four-year colleges or universities an opportunity to complete an undergraduate degree. Both universities have greatly expanded their offerings of evening or weekend off-campus undergraduate courses. Close cooperative relationships with community colleges have developed, so that in some cases the BOG program offers place-bound community college graduates an opportunity to complete a baccalaureate degree in their home towns. So many individuals in the Quad Cities metropolitan area showed an interest in the BOG program that a full-time Coordinator has resided there since the fall of 1975. The first Coordinator, Dr. John Raatjes, a historian, was first located at Black Hawk College, but in mid-1976 moved to a building leased by Western Illinois University from the East Moline School District. Dr. Vincent Cummings, a French language and literature specialist, became Quad Cities Coordinator in September, 1977.

Eastern has filled a similar need at Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul. Chanute is a technical training center which prepares Air Force personnel to be weather forecasters, jet engine repairmen, and electronics workers. Constant transfer from one installation to another prevented many of Chanute's staff members and their families from completing bachelors' degrees. Recognizing this need, Eastern has offered the BOG program at the Base and established an office there where advising is available on a regular basis. Debbie Hutton serves as program counselor for students at Chanute. Courses in the arts and sciences, business, and technical education are offered at convenient times for base personnel and their dependents as well as area residents.

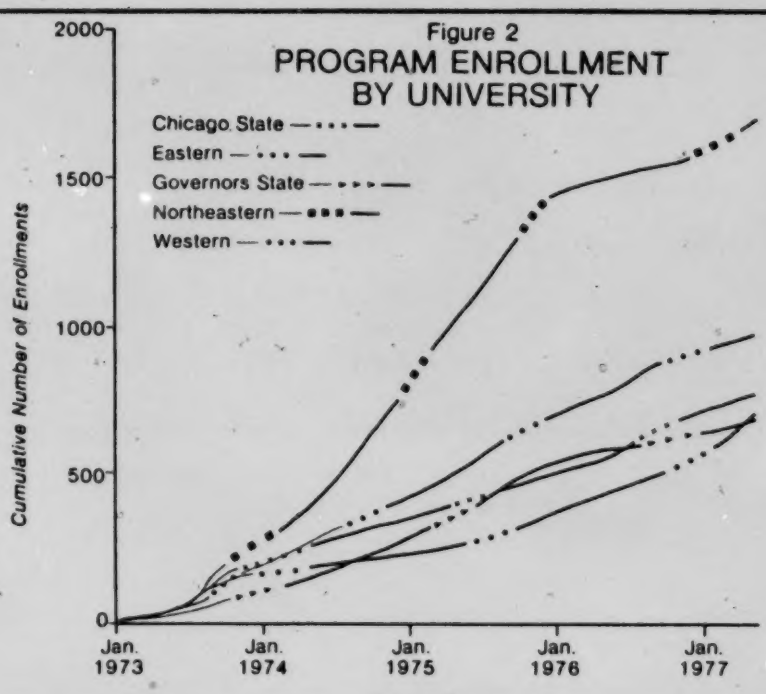
On-campus and extension classes cannot serve the needs of all students, especially adults who live in thinly populated areas, travel frequently, have an irregular work schedule, or whose family responsibilities keep them at home. For these individuals even the requirement that 15 semester hours of course work be completed at BOG universities may pose an insurmountable barrier. Only informally arranged independent study or readings courses were available until the spring of 1976 when Western, capitalizing on materials originally prepared for its unsuccessful Bachelor of Liberal Studies program, began offering formal independent studies courses on a regular basis. Acceptable newspaper, television, and other media courses also offer greater access to students unable to attend regular classes.

It was impossible to forecast how many adults would find the Board of Governors Program attractive and enroll in it. The Steering Committee, at its first meeting in November, 1972, estimated that thirty students might enroll at each university by the summer of 1973. Their estimates proved far too conservative, for by the fall of 1973, 686 students had already enrolled and 56 had graduated. (See Figures 1 and 2). A year later the number had expanded to 1,804



with more than 300 graduates. In October, 1975, thirty-four months after the program began, enrollments had swelled to nearly 3,000, and graduates to 678. This growth was not uniform throughout the system, however. The largest enrollments occurred at Northeastern, which accounted for nearly 40 percent of the total, followed by Eastern with 21 percent, and Chicago State with 16 percent. Governors State,

Figure 2
PROGRAM ENROLLMENT
BY UNIVERSITY

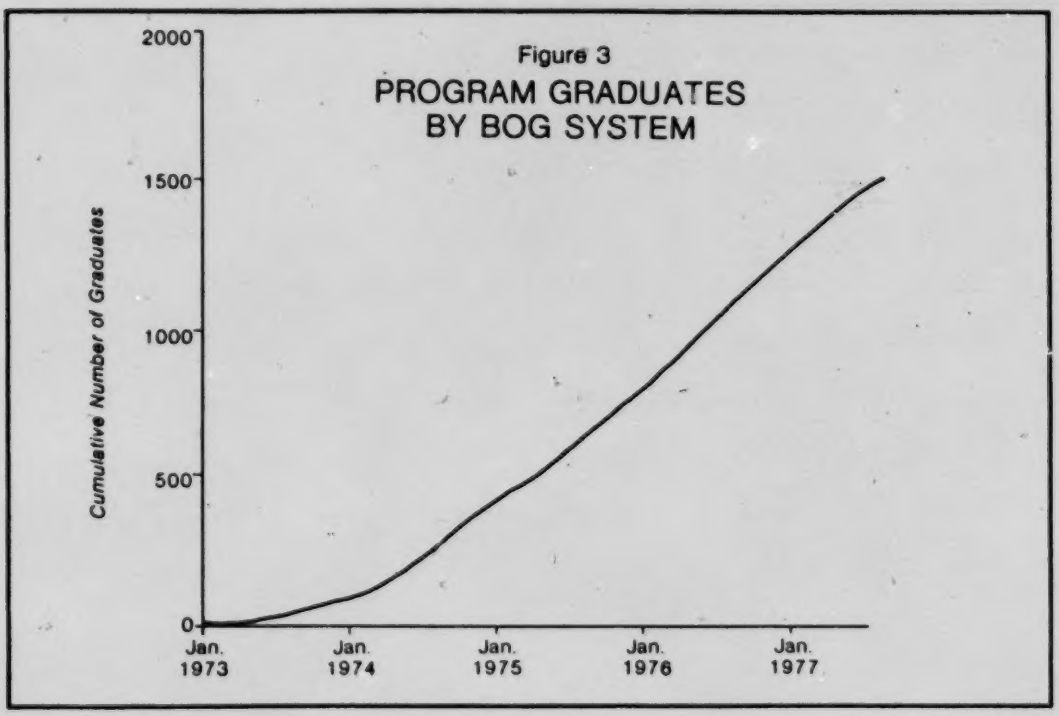


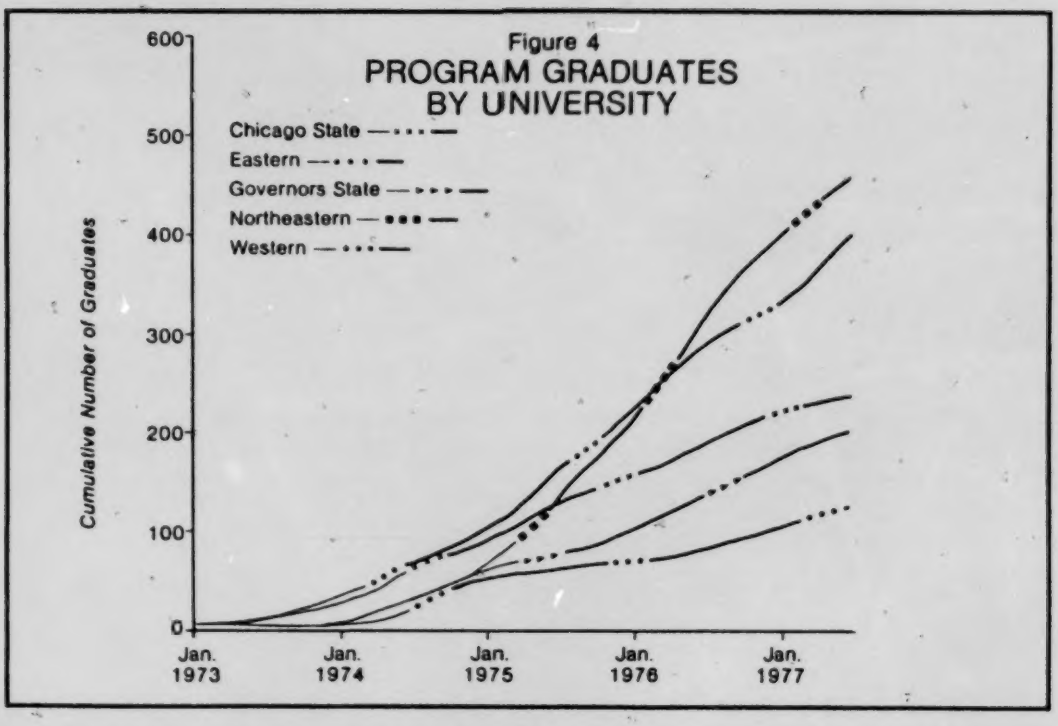
which limited enrollment to upper division students, had 14 percent, and Western's program, the smallest, accounted for 9 percent of the total.

Problems resulted from the rapid expansion of the program at Northeastern. Students admitted to the BOG program competed for limited class space with persons enrolled in other university programs. There were simply too few classes for everyone who wished to attend. The University's administration felt it had to limit new BOG enrollments, thus abandoning the "open admissions" philosophy of the program. But how should those to be admitted be chosen? At first applicants were selected on a first-come, first-served basis until the quota was filled. Since this seemed inequitable, a screening process was devised which used a variety of criteria,

including the number of previous college credits, academic goals, and the probability of credit awards for prior learning. Students enrolled in community college programs were encouraged to complete their associate degrees, and persons unlikely to profit from the distinctive features of the BOG program were counseled into other programs.

Despite enrollment quotas at Northeastern and temporary restrictions on admissions at Governors State, the Board of Governors program continued to grow. The opening of the Quad Cities center and the development of the independent study program especially stimulated expansion at Western, and large numbers of adults, particularly from Chanute, joined the Eastern program. By November 1976, a total of 4,294 students had been admitted, and nearly 1,200 had been graduated (see Figures 3 and 4). A year later,





as the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program completed its fifth year of operation, almost 5,500 students had enrolled and over 1,500 had received degrees.

BOARD OF GOVERNORS STUDENTS IN PROFILE

The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program was planned to provide additional opportunities for older, usually employed students to complete college degrees on a part-time basis. To measure the extent to which this objective is being met, each student entering the program completes a questionnaire providing information on marital status, employment, age, race or ethnicity, and address. In addition, applicants indicate their reasons for selecting the program. An analysis of 5,472 forms completed from

the beginning of the program through October, 1977 provides a profile of persons whom the program serves. Comparisons of BOG students with those enrolled in other public senior university programs in Illinois demonstrate the extent to which its clientele is unique, as indicated in Table 2.

The average age for undergraduates in Illinois public universities is 20.9 years for full-time and 27.7 years for part-time students. Also,

Table 2

AGE COMPARISONS:

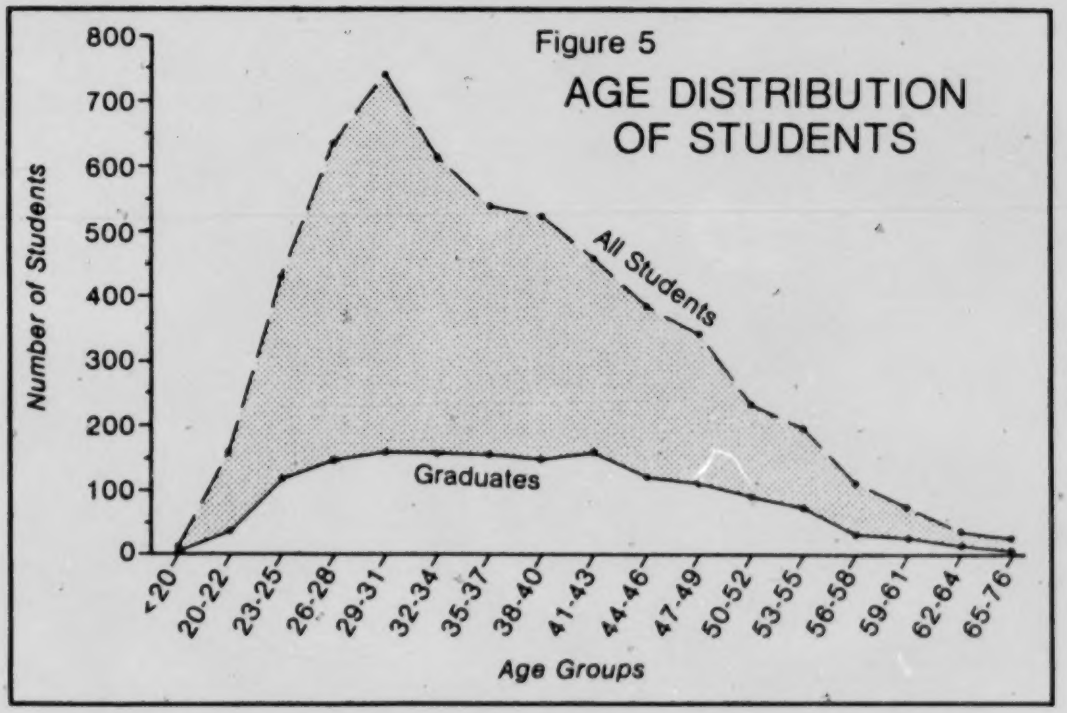
BOG PROGRAM STUDENTS & OTHERS IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

	Av. Age	% < 18	% 18-24	% 25-34	% 35+
All Illinois Undergraduates-Full-time	20.9	2.2	88.1	8.2	1.5
All Illinois Undergraduates-Part-time	27.7	1.4	46.7	34.8	17.1
BOG System Undergraduates	21.8	5.0	76.3	13.3	5.4
BOG Program Enrollees	36.0	0.0	8.0	38.0	53.9

88.1 percent of those who attend classes full-time and 46.7 percent of those who study part-time are 18 to 24 years old. Within the Board of Governors system, the average undergraduate is 21.8 years old.[5] In contrast to these statistics, the typical student in the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program is 36 years old when he or she enters the program. Only 8 percent of those admitted have been between 18 and 24. In all Illinois public universities, 8.2 percent

of full-time and 34.8 percent of part-time students are between the ages of 25 and 34. Only 38 percent of BOG students fall into what might be called the "slightly older than usual" category. Throughout Illinois' public university system, a mere 1.5 percent of full-time and 17.1 percent of part-time students are beyond age 34. Within the Board of Governors program, this older group, seemingly excluded from most other programs in the state, constitutes 53.9 percent, a clear majority of the total.

These statistics demonstrate that the great majority (91.9 percent) of BOG students are older than 25, an arbitrary cut-off for persons "above normal college age." As Figure 5 illustrates, the number of students



admitted increases with age at admission, climbing rapidly from only 9 who were under 20 and 164 who were 20 to 22 years of age to 639 aged 26 to 28.

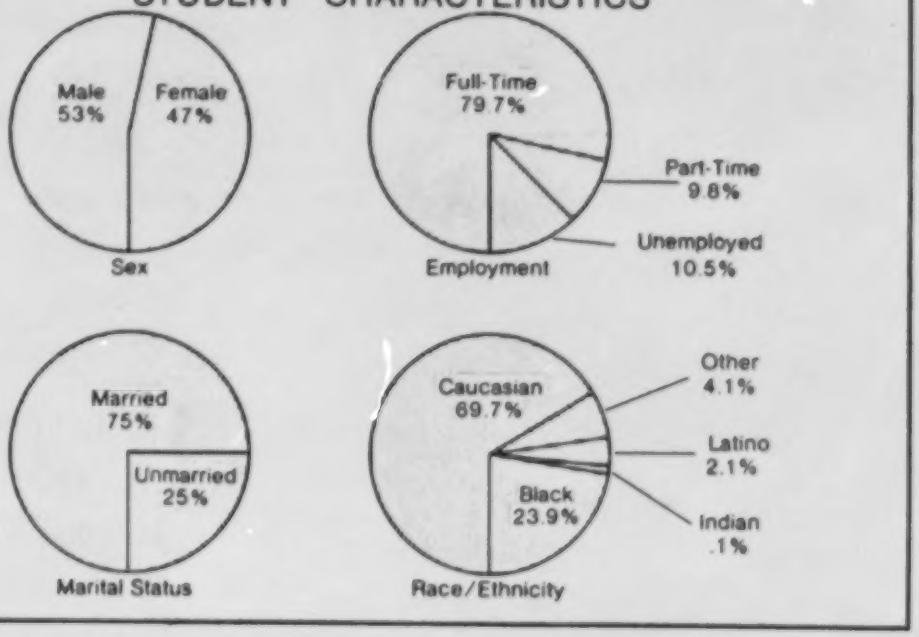
The number admitted peaks for the age group 29-31, after which there is a gradual decline. A significant number of enrolled students are 45 or older. In sum, the BOG student is an adult, 15 years older than the typical full-time undergraduate in Illinois and more than 8 years older than the average part-time student.

Among students who graduated from the program, these age tendencies become more apparent. Only 7 percent of those who have been graduated joined the program when they were younger than 24, whereas 32.8 percent were 25 to 34 and 59.8 percent were over 35. Comparing these percentages with the number of students within each of the same age groups, it is apparent that older students require less time to graduate than younger ones. Students below or just beyond 25 completed the program during the period of this study in smaller percentages than those older than 35, reversing the traditional stereotyped view that older students are unlikely to finish degrees.

Most BOG students are employed, usually on a full-time basis. Of all students who joined the program prior to the fall of 1977, nearly 90 percent held jobs (see Figure 6). 80 percent worked full-time and the remaining 10 percent were part-time workers. Three quarters were married. The proportion of unmarried students is higher in the Chicago area, probably reflecting the greater numbers of singles in the urban community.

How successful has the Board of Governors program been in providing educational opportunities for minority adults? System-

Figure 6
STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS



wide, 23.9 percent of those who enrolled in the BOG program were Black. This is substantially higher than the 15.5 percent in Board of Governors universities, the 10.2 percent within all public senior universities in the state, or the 12 percent of the population of Illinois which is Black. Based on enrollment data the Board of Governors program seems to provide Blacks a greater opportunity than most other educational programs in the state. The majority are at Chicago State, where 73 percent of BOG students are Black, while at Governors State the rate is 38.1 percent and at Northeastern 17.6 percent. Fewer than 5 percent of BOG students at Western and Eastern are Black, presumably because few live in the areas served by these institutions. Members of other minority groups have seldom enrolled

in the BOG program in substantial numbers, probably because their representation in the geographic areas near the universities is small. The one exception is Northeastern, where 4.6 percent of students are Latino.

During its five years of operation, the Board of Governors program admitted 53 percent men and 47 percent women, (see Table 3).

Table 3

SEX DISTRIBUTION OF BOG STUDENTS COMPARED WITH OTHER ILLINOIS STUDENTS

UNIV.	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG PROGRAM	ALL BOG UNIV. AVERAGE	ALL ILLINOIS PUBLIC UNIV. AVE.
% Male	51.5	55.5	59.7	50.5	51.5	53.0	47.0	53.4
% Female	48.9	44.5	40.3	49.5	48.5	47.0	53.0	46.6

At Northeastern, Chicago State and Western, the ratio between the sexes is approximately equal. Because of the large proportion of students coming from Chanute Air Force Base, Eastern enrolled 11 percent more men than women. The greatest difference occurs at Governors State, where 19 percent more men than women have been admitted. Overall a smaller proportion of women have enrolled in the BOG program than at Board of Governors universities generally, where they constitute over half the student body. The percentages are almost exactly the same, however, in the BOG program as in all senior public universities statewide.

The changing proportions of men and women in different age groups reflect the status of women in America as well as the attractiveness of the Board of Governors program. As indicated in Table 4, the largest proportion of men and the

Table 4

SEX DISTRIBUTION OF BOG STUDENTS BY AGE GROUP

	Under 25	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+
No. Female	166	340	392	428	397	362	257	144	58	18
% Female	45.1	32.9	37.9	46.1	51.4	59.8	65.9	64.3	77.3	51.4
No. Male	198	694	644	501	374	243	133	80	17	17
% Male	53.9	67.1	62.1	53.9	48.4	40.2	34.1	35.7	22.7	48.6

smallest number of women are to be found among students aged 25 to 29, a period when most men have begun work and are seeking upward mobility while many women are giving birth to and raising children, devoting their time and energy to running a household and caring for families rather than attending universities. In each age group thereafter up to age 64, however, the proportion of women increases and the number of men decreases. By age 44 there are more women than men, with nearly twice as many in the 55 to 59 age group and almost three times as many between 60 and 64. This information suggests, as has other literature on life patterns,[6] that men are more likely to seek a college degree while younger,

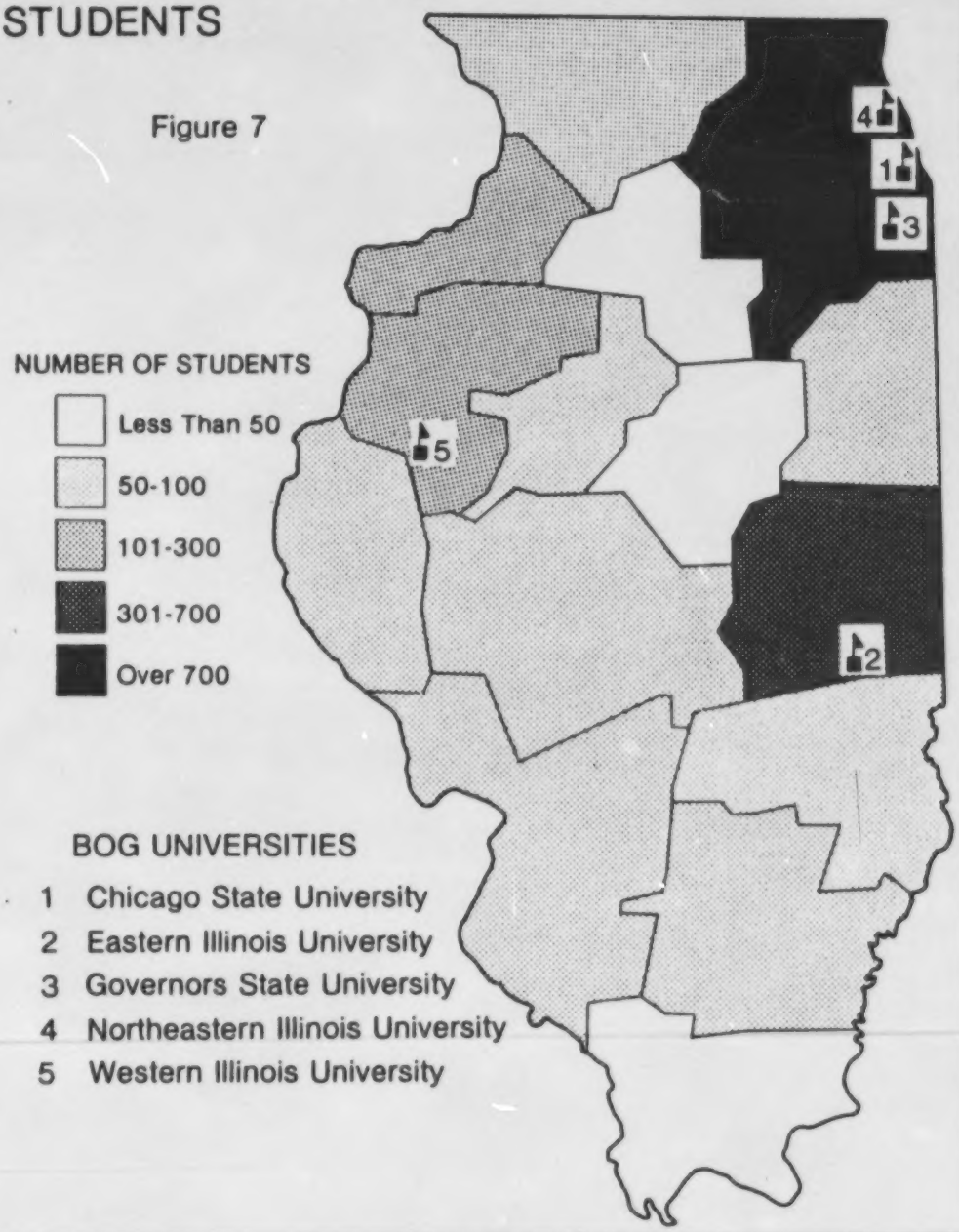
and women often decide to complete their education at a later age, perhaps with a goal of securing employment.

There are other reasons, too, why more women have not enrolled in the Board of Governors program. Working women probably receive less encouragement from their employers, family, or friends to return to college. Moreover, use of the term "work experience" has led many potential BOG students to presume that the program is designed for business, professional, or industrial workers and that credit is given only for salaried activities. Clearly, too little has been done to make the possible advantages of the BOG program known to women or to develop procedures whereby credit can be awarded for what women have learned as home managers, child rearers, consumers, volunteers, active citizens, or avid readers.

Where in Illinois do Board of Governors program students live? As shown in Figure 7, an analysis of student zip codes indicates that the largest proportion reside in the Chicago area, and that large numbers are clustered around Charleston, Rantoul, Macomb and the Quad Cities, where program offices are located. The greater the distance from a Board of Governors institution, the smaller the number of students who have enrolled. What is especially interesting, however, are the number of BOG students per 10,000 population as shown in Figure 8. The program has had its greatest impact in downstate areas near Eastern and Western and in the Quad Cities,

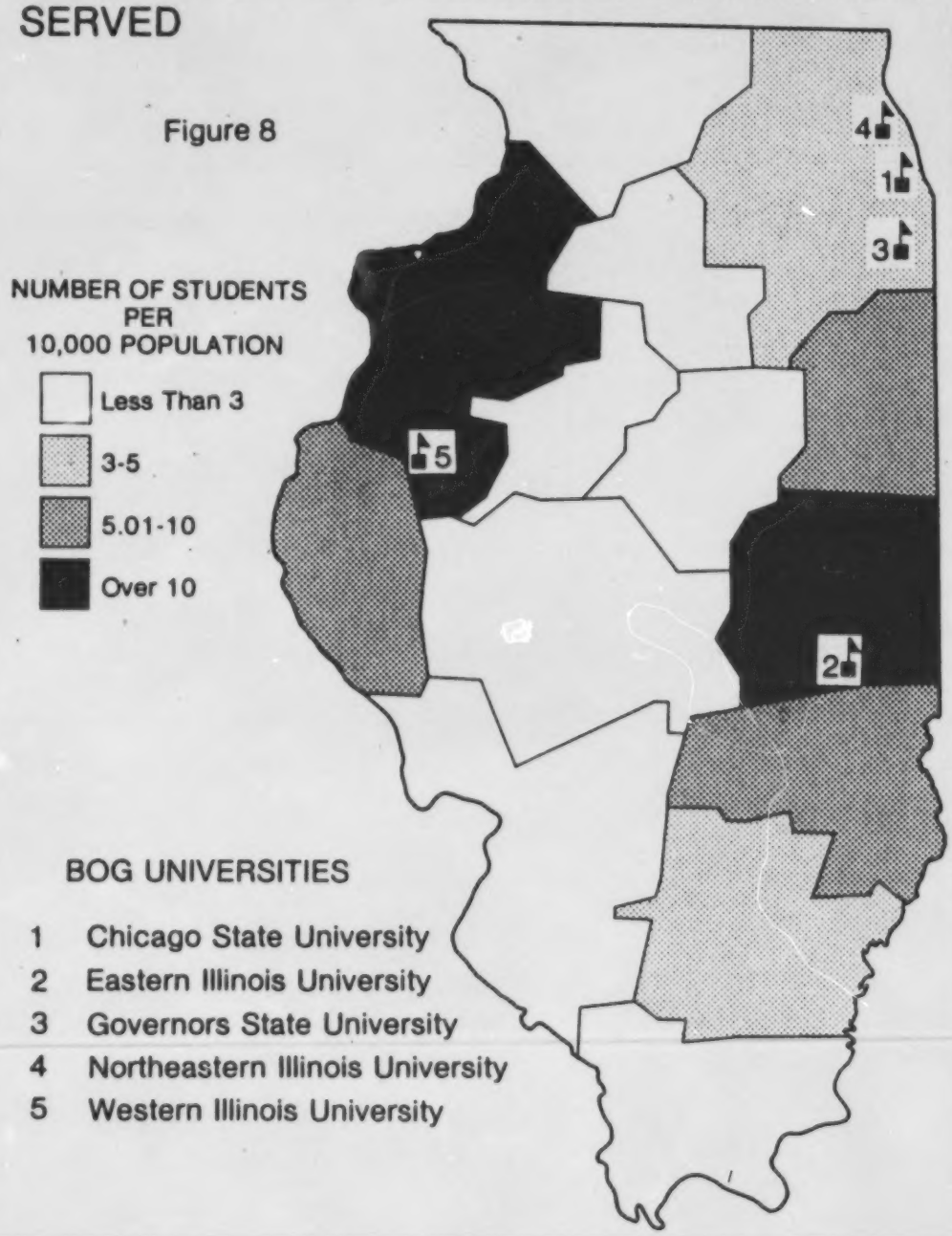
GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ENROLLED STUDENTS

Figure 7



PROPORTION OF THE ILLINOIS POPULATION SERVED

Figure 8



where 17.8, 12.9, and 12.6 persons respectively have enrolled for every 10,000 residents. By contrast, only 4.7 per 10,000 have enrolled in Chicago. These statistics may be explained by the large number of educational opportunities available in Chicago and the absence of programs other than the BOG in many areas downstate. Moreover, they clearly demonstrate the need either to expand the BOG program or to create similar educational opportunities to serve adults in northern, central, and southern Illinois.

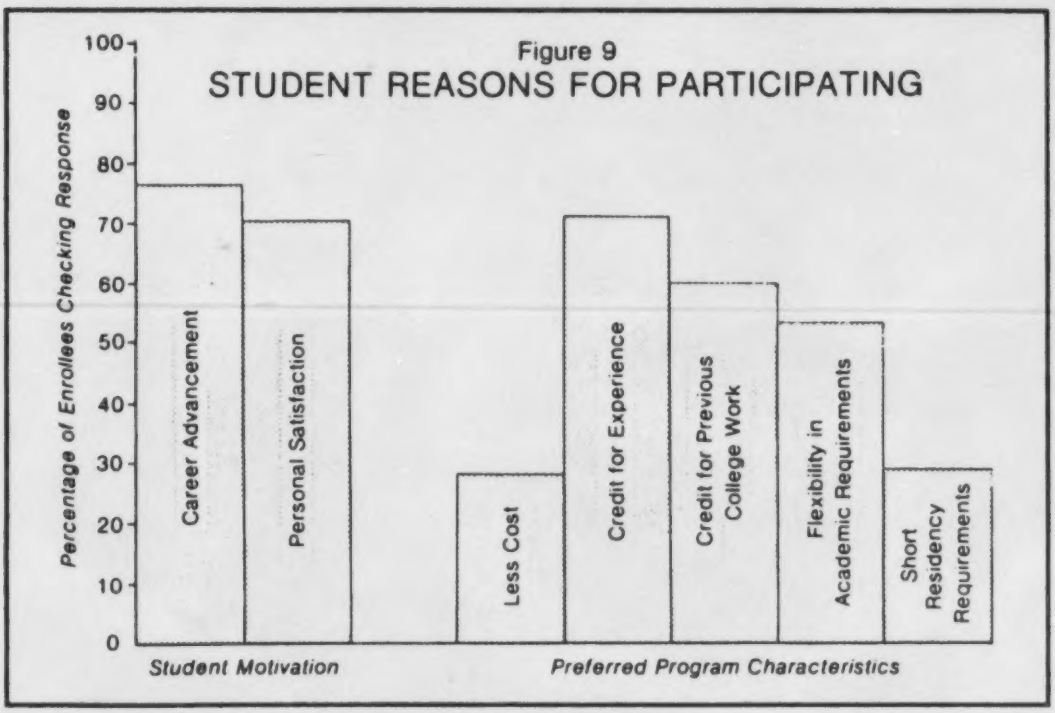
As the program has become more widely known, large numbers of inquiries are received from throughout the United States and many foreign countries. A limited number of out-of-state or foreign students have enrolled, planning to complete work at a BOG institution with independent study, correspondence courses or limited periods on campus. Others, having started the program and completed 15 or more credits at a BOG institution, have fulfilled additional degree requirements after moving elsewhere in the country. This is especially true of military personnel, corporate employees advancing within their companies and members of their families.

Who, when all the information has been tabulated, is a typical student enrolling in the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program? Men are somewhat more likely to participate than women, especially in younger age groups. Most are in their middle to late thirties, married, and employed on a full-time basis. The majority are Caucasian, except at Chicago State where most are Black. Nearly all live within easy driving distance of a Board of Governors university, mostly in the Chicago metropolitan area or in other fairly large

towns downstate. The success of the program is in large measure demonstrated by the fact that these are exactly the kinds of students for whom it was designed.

Why have such large numbers of adults chosen to enroll in the BOG program? Which of its characteristics do they find most appealing? These and other questions related to student motivations may be answered by evaluating their responses to a series of questions asking why they chose to enter the BOG program.

Are professional and vocational needs more important in motivating students to enroll for the BOG program than personal or psychological desires? When asked if career advancement and/or personal satisfaction were important in selecting the BOG program, most students checked both, suggesting complex motivation and difficulty in separating these two interrelated factors. As Figure 9 portrays, seven percent more checked career advancement (77 percent)



than personal satisfaction (70.3 percent), which seems to demonstrate that the BOG program does not appeal to many persons exclusively interested in knowledge for its own sake. BOG students are likely to be practical individuals who are well aware that upward mobility in our society frequently requires the completion of a degree. This is not to suggest, however, that there are not also a great many students with a personal interest in education or a thirst for greater knowledge.

Asked whether the BOG program offered them the only opportunity to secure a degree, 41.2 percent of applicants responded positively. What is revealing are the variations among universities. In the Chicago area, where several programs are oriented toward adults, the BOG program is chosen out of preference rather than necessity. Only 26.4 percent of students at Chicago State, 35.3 percent at Northeastern, and 39.9 percent at Governors State said they could not complete a degree otherwise. Downstate, however, few options are available, and residence requirements exclude most persons living at any distance from a campus. More than half the students in these areas (56 percent at Eastern, and 50.2 percent at Western) agreed that without the BOG program it would be impossible for them to earn a baccalaureate degree.

Similar geographic differences are reflected in student responses to a series of questions asking which of five program characteristics influenced their decision to enroll: less cost, credit for work experience, credit for all previous collegiate work, flexibility in academic requirements, or short residency requirements. As Figure 9 also shows, the item checked most

frequently (by 71.1 percent of all applicants and varying little among the campuses) is the availability of credit for prior experience, perhaps the most innovative aspect of the program. The ability to receive credit for courses completed at other colleges and universities appealed to 60.2 percent of students, substantially more (78.8 percent) at Eastern, no doubt due to the exceptional mobility of military personnel at Chanute. Just over half the students (53.4 percent) found the general flexibility of the academic requirements attractive; this split probably reflects a division among students over whether an academic major is or is not desirable. More students at Eastern (78.8 percent) emphasized this provision than elsewhere.

The small number of hours required from BOG institutions had relatively little appeal in the Chicago metropolitan area, because of easy access to campuses. Only 18.4 percent of students at Chicago State, 20.4 percent at Northeastern and 22.8 percent at Governors State identified this as an important determinant in their selection of the program. But this aspect is much more important downstate; 33.9 percent of students at Western and a majority (53.8 percent) at Eastern checked it. The low cost of the program was less important everywhere, with only 26.8 percent of all students identifying it as a reason for entering the program.

What becomes clear from these responses is that it is the combination of features which appeals to most working adults. Eliminating any single aspect except low cost would result in a substantial reduction in applicants. The availability of credit for

prior experiential learning is a vital factor for most students who also want to use the educational resources available at a variety of colleges and universities. A majority favor a program which allows considerable flexibility in program design; for example, provisions allowing but not requiring a major adequately meet student needs. And eliminating the need to earn a large number of hours in residence on a campus is more important downstate than in Chicago.

ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING

The assessment of prior learning experiences for college credit is an integral and essential part of the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program. The administrative guidelines on this aspect of the program are not extensive, but despite the lack of detail, a relatively consistent and uniform set of procedures has developed at each of the five universities. Overall, procedures have varied only slightly since the program started, although modifications have improved both the processes and their outcomes.

The student seeking credit for prior learning experiences submits a documented statement of his or her learning experiences and their outcomes in the form of a portfolio. The Program Coordinator at the university sponsoring the student's degree selects appropriate faculty members or other experts to evaluate the material and recommend the credit to be awarded. The Coordinator reviews the recommendation prior to its submission to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for final approval and entry onto the student's permanent academic record.

Whenever possible, evaluations are completed by faculty members with appropriate subject matter expertise. The responsibility for recommending credit is thus held by the same professionals who determine the award of credit earned through classroom work in universities, the full-time faculty. As is the case with conventional classroom-originated credit, the process allows individual faculty members to exercise their professional judgment in determining the amount and nature of the credit awarded. There may be some inconsistency and unevenness in the process, and differing professional judgments may be made about the academic value of roughly comparable nonacademic experiences and their outcomes, but review processes ensure additional validity and quality control.

The efforts of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL) have assisted in the design and refinement of valid and reliable assessment processes. The Board of Governors System Office and the five universities have participated in CAEL activities since 1974 and utilize CAEL materials in the development of faculty and student guides. Governors State has participated in CAEL-sponsored research on the assessment process and in its national Faculty Development Program. The Board of Governors System constitutes a cluster within the current CAEL Institutional Development Program.

CAEL has identified and reported in its literature six basic steps in the assessment of experiential learning: identification of college-level learning, articulation and relation to degree objectives, documentation and verification of learning, measurement of the extent of learning involved, evaluation of learning

and determination of credit equivalence, and transcripting of the credit awarded.[7] The processes employed within the Board of Governors Program may be summarized with respect to each of these basic steps.

Identification and Articulation. As students enter the program at each institution, they are provided with written materials describing the assessment process. In many cases they meet with the Coordinator or a counselor individually or in small groups to discuss portfolio preparation and most universities have developed student handbooks which provide detailed guidelines on the concept and organization of the portfolio. Workshops offered by the universities assist students in identifying their nonacademic learning experiences which are college level, describing the experiences and their learning outcomes, and indicating the relationship of these learning experiences to their degree goals. Credit may be awarded for learning experiences in any academic area which is equivalent to college-level work. Descriptions of the student's learning experiences and their outcomes comprise the essential elements of a portfolio, which also includes a chronological record of the student's life, an autobiographical statement, and an identification of skills or knowledge in a narrative form or with competency statements.

Documentation. Students must provide evidence to substantiate the learning outcomes which they have claimed. Work samples, evaluative statements from supervisors or peers, job descriptions, evidence of certification or licensure, publications, course completion certificates, and other verifications of accomplishment may be utilized, along with news articles, letters of commendation, and other more

personal materials. Detailed narrative statements from students provide evidence of what was learned from the experiences; interviews may be required to provide additional proof. In addition, evaluators may verify the authenticity of documentation.

Measurement and Evaluation. A single faculty evaluator or non-university expert ordinarily recommends credit for each academic area, although in some infrequent instances entire departments are involved in making evaluations and in other situations the department chairperson assists in selecting appropriate evaluators. Individual faculty members often consult informally with their colleagues. The selection of evaluators provides the Coordinator with a means of assuring quality control, since individuals who appear to be excessively strict or generous in comparison with the faculty as a whole can be provided with feedback on their recommendations or be replaced by other faculty members.

As a result of faculty development efforts on most campuses, evaluators have developed greater competence and confidence in the assessment of experiential learning. Workshops on assessment have been conducted at several universities. Faculty and student handbooks for use in conjunction with CAEL materials are generally utilized on the campuses.

Generally faculty have evaluated portfolios on a voluntary basis. The extent of cooperation has been remarkable, although delays have occurred when a relatively small number of willing and capable assessors have been overly burdened with requests for evaluations. There is evidence from experiments at Governors State that the availability of

token monetary rewards for performing these services will encourage the participation of additional faculty members and speed up the process of evaluation. Where appropriate faculty expertise is unavailable, the Coordinator may select an off-campus evaluator, usually someone with academic experience at another institution, who is usually compensated.

The assessor receives appropriate portions of the portfolio and is encouraged to request additional information or verification of competence if it is found necessary. Any number of evaluative techniques, including interviews with students, may be utilized. The recommendation for credit, using forms developed at each institution, may be in the form of equivalent course titles or subject areas and includes both the number of credits and whether at the lower or upper division level. Evaluators are requested to indicate the basis of the recommendation.

When the evaluations have been received, the Coordinator reviews them and may reduce but not increase the recommendations. It is also the Coordinator's responsibility to see that overlaps or duplication of credit are eliminated. Where students question the credit award, informal appeals procedures may lead to the submission of supplementary material, a re-evaluation by the original assessor, or the review of the portfolio by a different evaluator. The responsibility for maintaining consistency and equity lies with the Coordinator, although in some cases a faculty committee reviews the recommendations before they are submitted to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for final approval.

Transcripting. The credit award is entered on a student's record with an indication that it is based on assessment of prior learning experiences. Credit may be identified by equivalent course title, subject area or HEGIS category. Grades are not indicated.

A number of students have noted that the assessment process itself is often of educational value. By examining their own background and knowledge through a self-assessment, students acquire more accurate recognition of their skills and are assisted in further education or career planning. Moreover, the process may result in the award of substantial numbers of credits. As Table 5 shows, not all BOG graduates have received credit for what they have learned through experience, with

Table 5

BOG PROGRAM GRADUATES RECEIVING SEMESTER HOURS OF CREDIT BY PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of Graduates With Portfolio Awards	178	344	187	390	55	1,154
% of Graduates With Portfolio Awards	72.1	80.6	85.4	81.9	38.2	76.2
Average Award per Portfolio	32.8	36.7	38.1	42.9	20.3	37.6
Average Award for All Graduates	23.6	29.6	32.5	35.1	7.8	28.7

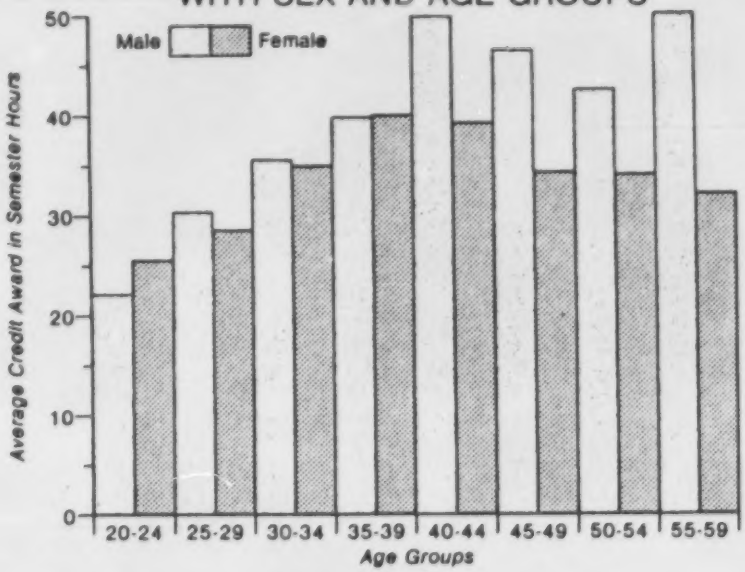
the proportion varying from a high of over 85 percent at Governors State to a low of less than 40 percent at Western. An average of 76.2 percent of graduates systemwide receives credit for prior learning using these

procedures. The size of average awards varies among the campuses. Northeastern has made the largest credit awards, probably in part because it has restricted enrollment to students who could benefit from this aspect of the program. At Western, where the fewest portfolios were submitted, the average credit award was half the size of that at Northeastern. The system average of 37.6 semester hours closely matches credit awards at the other three universities.

On the average, men received slightly more credits (39.2) than women (35.7). In correlating age and sex with credit awards, Figure 10 shows that average awards to men and women do not differ greatly up

Figure 10

CORRELATION OF CREDIT AWARDS WITH SEX AND AGE GROUPS

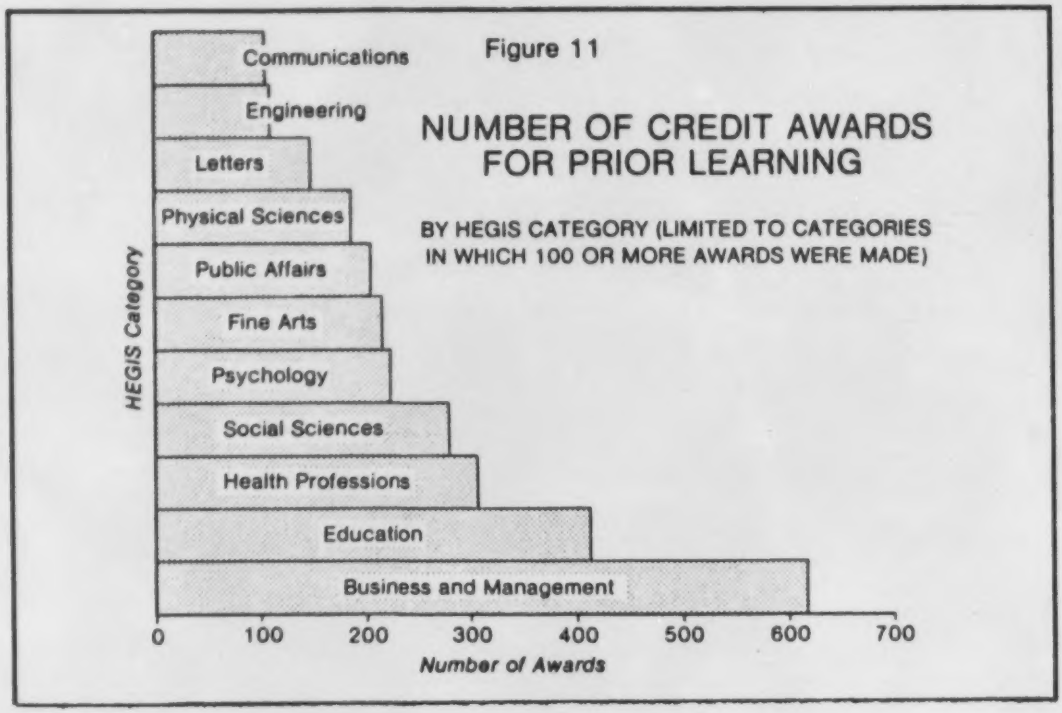


to age 39, but that credit awards to women are significantly smaller in older age groups.

For men, the average award increases up to the age group 40-44, then decreases slightly through age group 50-54 and increases again for

age group 55-59. For women, the maximum average award is for the 35-39 age group, and the awards tend to level off in later years. The higher average awards for men at age 40 and above suggest greater recognition of work-related learning experience than of competence acquired through home and volunteer activities.

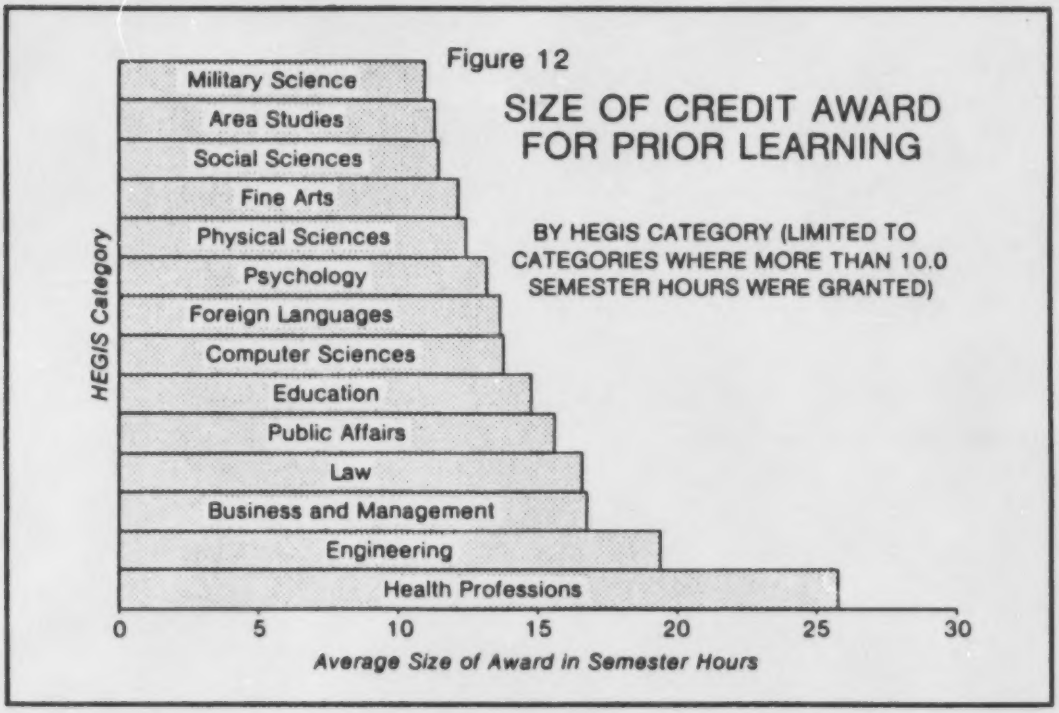
The largest number of credit awards have been in business and management, education, the health professions, social science, and psychology as indicated in Figure 11. This is not surprising, since



many of the adults entering the program are experienced in business or are para-professionals in education, health care, or the social services. The areas in which fewer awards have been made are letters, engineering, and communications.

The size of credit awards, as appearing in Figure 12, also varies considerably by subject. The health professions, engineering, and

Figure 12



business and management, where the largest awards were made, are comprehensive fields where individuals may have had a variety of experiences over long periods of time. Credits awarded in a single HEGIS category may represent several separate faculty evaluations. Smaller awards, on the other hand, have been common in subjects of more limited scope or those where it is more difficult to demonstrate broad, comprehensive knowledge.

These statistics demonstrate the relative importance of credit awards for prior experience, an aspect of the Board of Governors program which many students consider to be its most significant feature and what sets it apart from most other academic programs. This is an important time- and money-saving provision, especially for adults who study on a

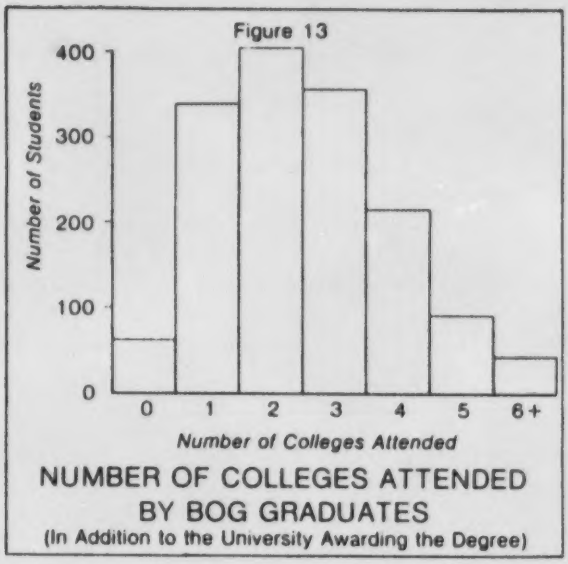
part-time basis, and a program lacking this feature would be far less attractive. While a typical student receives just over one-fourth of the credits required for a degree from a portfolio evaluation, it should be clear that the BOG program does not award a baccalaureate degree solely on the basis of prior learning. This is merely one component in a degree package that generally also includes a great deal of traditional course work.

BOG STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Adults enrolling in the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program utilize a variety of options in completing their degrees. Many have taken course work at other institutions which can be transferred into the program, and even after enrolling in a BOG institution the student may still take classes at other accredited colleges or universities. Each student is required to earn credits from one or more universities within the Board of Governors System. Using information from the records of over 1,500 students who graduated from the program by May, 1977, it is possible to measure the popularity of various features and to outline the composition of typical students' programs.

The utilization of credit from more than one educational institution is an important characteristic of the BOG program as illustrated in Figure 13. Only 4 percent of the students who have graduated took all their classes at the institution which granted their degree, and less than one-fourth enrolled at only one other college. The typical BOG student attends two or three colleges in addition to the one conferring the degree, and a substantial number have credits from three or more universities. Students have utilized

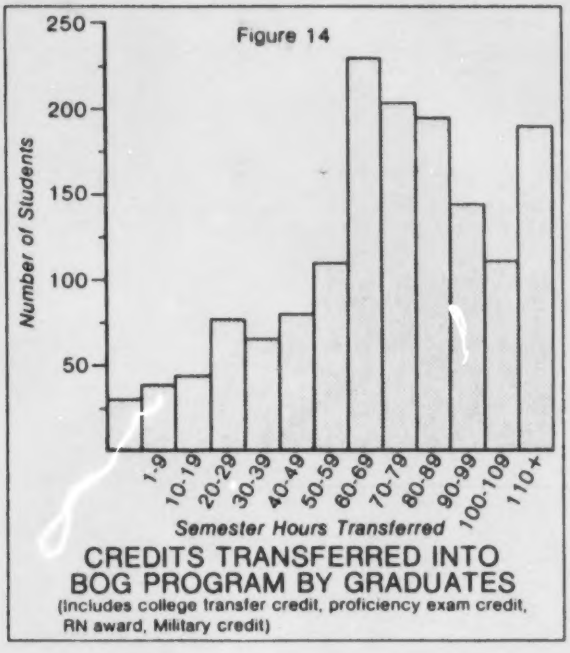
Figure 13



NUMBER OF COLLEGES ATTENDED BY BOG GRADUATES
(In Addition to the University Awarding the Degree)

courses from as many as nine colleges and universities, resulting in praise that the program makes it possible for one to "bring it all together." Community colleges constitute the most common source of credit, although many adults have attended private colleges or senior public universities in Illinois and other states as well.

The credits transferred from other institutions constitute the major portion of most students' BOG programs. Figure 14 shows that two-thirds of graduates earned sixty or more hours from non-Board of Governors institutions. Many earned 80 to 100 hours, and 12.5 percent transferred 110 or more hours. Some had already earned 120 hours or more but still lacked a college diploma and needed only to complete 15 hours through a Board of Governors university to be awarded a baccalaureate degree.



While nearly all students transfer course work taken at other colleges, only a few have utilized several specialized features of the program. It was anticipated that community college graduates would find the program appealing. During its first years, as shown in Table 6, only 7.6 percent of graduates of the BOG program had completed

Table 6

BOG PROGRAM GRADUATES HOLDING ASSOCIATE DEGREES

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of Graduates With Associate Degrees	17	17	32	42	7	115
% of Graduates With Associate Degrees	6.9	4.0	14.3	8.8	4.9	7.6

two-year degrees. The number is largest at Governors State, an exclusively upper division and graduate university designed in part to accommodate

community college transfers, and lowest at the downstate universities. The low rate of transfers may reflect the absence of adult-oriented degrees at many community colleges, a problem now being addressed by the development of flexible Associate of Liberal Studies degrees in many community colleges. It also suggests the need for closer cooperation and greater collaboration between BOG program officials and community colleges.

The Steering Committee has authorized the granting of 45 hours of credit to registered nurses for their hospital training. Table 7 shows that 163 persons (10.77 percent of total graduates) have taken advantage

Table 7

BOG PROGRAM GRADUATES RECEIVING RN CREDIT AWARDS

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of RN Awards	8	73	18	44	20	163
% of Graduates Receiving RN Awards	3.2	11.1	8.1	9.2	13.9	10.77

of this provision. The successful use of this credit award suggests the need to identify other groups for which similar provisions may be developed.

The original proposal for the Board of Governors Degree Program envisioned the utilization of proficiency examinations to measure prior learning. The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) is available at or near each campus, and students are encouraged to use its general and subject examinations to demonstrate their knowledge. Just over one BOG graduate in ten (11.6 percent) received credit

by examination (see Table 8). The proportion is significantly higher at Eastern than elsewhere, probably because of the Coordinator's encouragement and the emphasis on examinations within the military.

Table 8

BOG PROGRAM GRADUATES RECEIVING CREDIT
BY PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of Graduates Receiving Proficiency Credit	12	107	19	32	6	176
% of Graduates Receiving Proficiency Credit	4.9	15.1	8.5	6.7	4.2	11.6
Average Number of Credits Awarded	9.3	20.6	12.9	20.2	17.7	18.8

Systemwide, BOG students who passed these tests received an average of 18.8 semester hours of credit.

Proficiency examinations have been successfully used in other adult degree programs, notably in the Regents External Degree in New York and at Thomas A. Edison College in New Jersey. The increased availability of the American College Testing's Proficiency Examination Program (PEP) may stimulate additional student interest. Actual experience has shown that little use has been made of on-campus proficiency examinations, although they are successfully used elsewhere.

The same credit awards available to other students within the Board of Governors universities for military training and experience are given to BOG program students as well. A standard award is usually made to anyone who has served honorably for a minimum specified period. The American Council on Education's recommendations are used to determine

the credit awarded for military schools. Table 9 indicates that 22.2 percent of BOG graduates have received credit for military service or training, the largest percentages at Eastern and Northeastern.

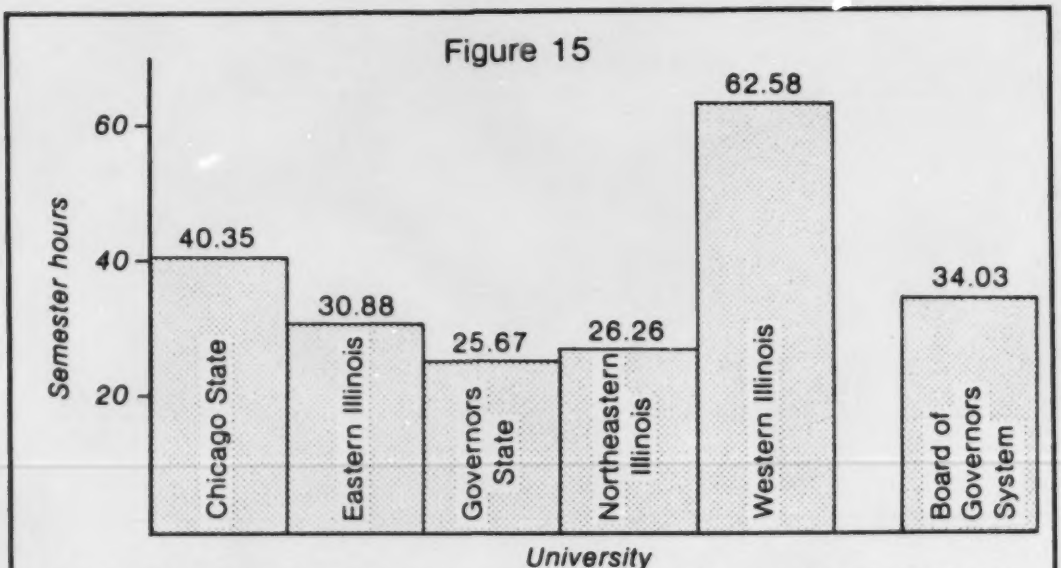
Table 9

BOG PROGRAM GRADUATES RECEIVING CREDIT FOR MILITARY SERVICE AND TRAINING

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of Graduates Receiving Military Credit	28	124	26	131	28	337
% of Graduates Receiving Military Credit	11.3	29.0	11.7	27.4	19.4	22.2

Each student earning a Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree must complete a minimum of 15 semester hours at one or a combination of BOG universities. As is shown in Figure 15, most earn substantially

Figure 15



AVERAGE NUMBER OF CREDITS EARNED AT SPONSORING BOG UNIVERSITY (by Graduates)

more than the required minimum and they usually concentrate their studies at the school awarding their degree. On the average, graduates have earned 33.7 semester hours through class work at the university granting their degree, slightly over one-fourth of the credits required for the degree and somewhat more than the 30-hour "residency requirement" common at most universities. There is a close but not perfect reverse correlation between the amount of credit awarded for academic experience and the number of hours earned at the degree-granting institution. As Table 10 shows, persons receiving more

Table 10

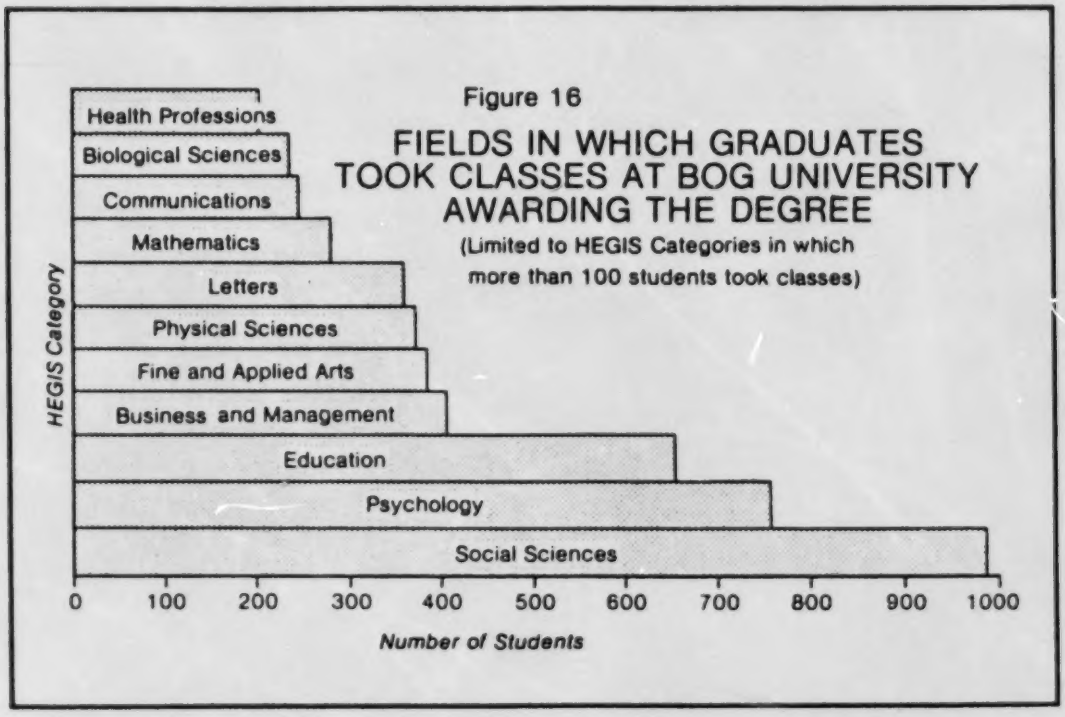
AVERAGE CREDITS RECEIVED BY PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT RELATED TO AVERAGE CREDITS EARNED AT UNIVERSITY GRANTING DEGREE

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
Average Credits by Portfolio Assessment	23.6	29.6	32.5	35.1	7.8	28.7
Average Credits Earned at Institution Awarding Degree	40.4	33.9	25.7	26.3	62.6	34.0

credits for prior learning generally earn fewer credits at the university granting the degree. At Governors State and Northeastern, which made the largest awards for prior learning, students took the fewest classes, an average of 25.7 and 26.3 semester hours respectively, while at Western, which awarded the fewest hours for portfolios, they enrolled for the most classes, an average of 62.6 semester hours. These differences may be explained by the fact that GSU offers only

upper-division courses, by classroom shortages at Northeastern which encouraged students to take courses elsewhere, by greater conservatism among downstate students and faculty, or by the inaccessibility to most Western students of other colleges and universities.

Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree students enroll for classes in all academic fields offered at the universities (see Figure 16). Social science, psychology, education, business and



management are the dominant subjects they study, while enrollments for natural science or mathematics and the humanities are strong on most campuses. Probably in part because of the close association of Board of Governors universities with teaching, many students have taken course work in education despite certification problems. Not surprisingly there is a fairly positive correlation between the areas

in which they received awards of credit for prior experience and those in which they took classes. This suggests that in general students develop themselves further in areas in which they already have achieved some proficiency.

One advantage of a systemwide approach to adult education is the flexibility students can be given in attending various universities within the state. The concept, originally expressed in the proposal to establish the BOG program, is that anyone who enrolls in the BOG program can select classes at any campus in the system, including rural as well as urban settings. The administrative guidelines allow the minimum number of credits required from the Board of Governors system to be earned at any combination of institutions and have provisions designed to facilitate enrollment at several campuses. While this has happened at a limited extent in the Chicago area as Table 11 demonstrates, it is almost never feasible for students residing down-

Table 11

NUMBER OF BOG GRADUATES WHO HAVE ATTENDED BOG UNIVERSITIES OTHER THAN UNIVERSITY AWARDING THE DEGREE

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
No. of Graduates Who Attended BOG Universities Other Than University Awarding the Degree	17	7	26	65	1	117
% of Graduates Who Attended BOG Universities Other Than University Awarding the Degree	6.9	1.6	6.9	13.6	0.7	7.6

state, and a mere 7.6 percent of all graduates have attended a BOG institution other than the one from which they graduated. Only at Northeastern did the proportion who had studied elsewhere within the system exceed 10 percent. For those few students who utilize it, this provision may be valuable, but it has not been critical to the success of the program.

Most adults are able to complete a Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree in a shorter length of time than would probably be the case in most other programs (see Table 12). An analysis of data available for 1,511 of the graduates shows that 16.8 percent finished

Table 12

TIME REQUIRED FOR GRADUATES TO COMPLETE DEGREE

Months Between Admission and Graduation	1-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30	31-36	36+
Number in Group	254	443	384	245	82	68	35
% of Graduates in Group	16.8	29.3	25.4	16.2	5.4	4.5	2.3

in less than six months. They probably had already earned substantial credit elsewhere, received large credit awards for prior learning experiences, or had previously attended a Board of Governors university. The majority (54.7 percent) completed all requirements between 7 and 18 months after being admitted. Only a relatively few (12.2 percent) took more than two years to earn a degree.

BOG degree program students are required to complete the traditional 120 semester hours to graduate. Most earn substantially more. This may be accounted for by the need to take 15 hours from a Board of Governors university regardless of previous college work or to meet the general education and upper division requirements. Students may receive more hours for their prior experiences than are needed to graduate. Moreover, adults sometimes wish to take more than the minimum number of classes to gain new skills, expand their knowledge, or develop their expertise. Systemwide, as shown in Table 13, the average graduate earns 134.3 hours, with the average varying on the campuses from 138.8 at Chicago State to 126.3 at Governors State.

Table 13

THE COMPOSITION OF BOG GRADUATES' ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

University	CSU	EIU	GSU	UNI	WIU	BOG SYSTEM
Average No. of Credits Earned	138.8	135.2	126.3	134.9	134.3	134.3
Average % of Credit Transferred	53.9	53.0	53.9	54.5	47.6	53.3
Average % of Credit Awarded for Prior Learning	17.0	21.9	25.7	26.0	5.8	21.4
Average % of Credit Earned at University Awarding Degree	29.1	25.1	20.3	19.5	46.6	25.3

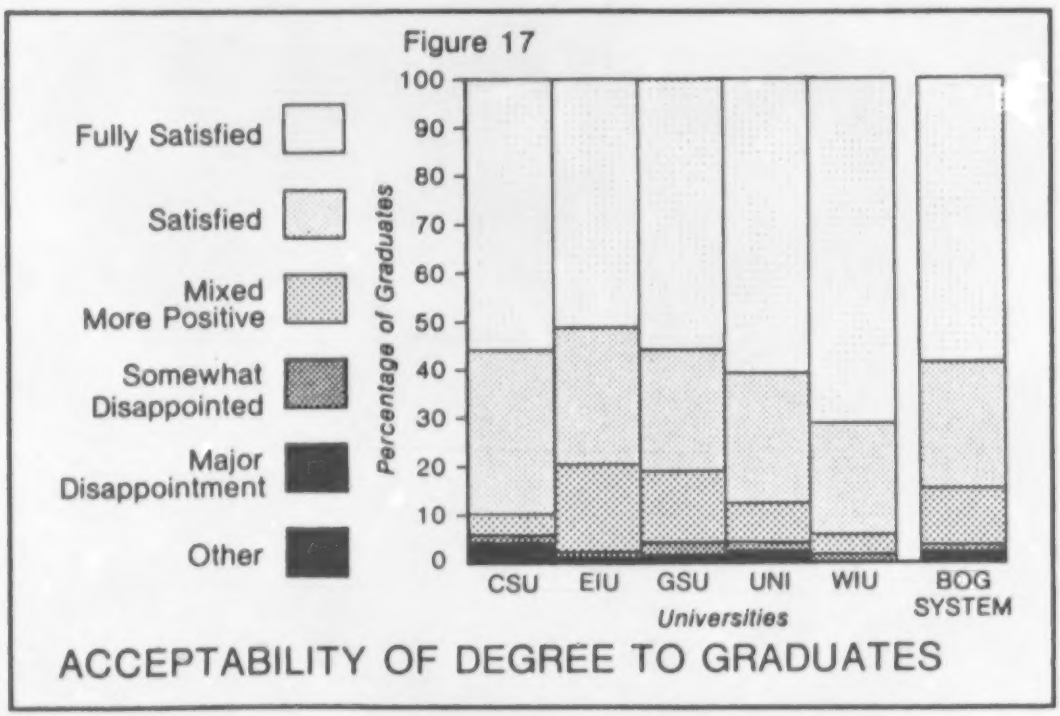
Combining these statistics makes it possible to calculate an average or typical program for a graduate of the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program. Most students complete slightly more than half of their credits (53.3 percent) utilizing courses transferred from other institutions or credit granted for proficiency exams, military service, or the Registered Nurse certificate. The percentage varies little among the campuses, except at Western where students transferred an average of only 47.6 percent of their credits. The size of credit awards for prior experience varies more dramatically, and the percentage of an average student's total program completed through the assessment of prior learning ranges from 26 percent at Northeastern to only 5.8 percent at Western. The systemwide average is 21.4 percent. The proportion of classes taken at the university granting the degree varies from a low of 19.5 percent at Northeastern to a high of 46.6 percent at Western, averaging just over one quarter, 25.3 percent.

While these numbers represent statistical averages, and individual students' programs naturally vary considerably in their composition, the statistics demonstrate the manner in which the various aspects of the Board of Governors program fit together to create a flexible yet responsible pattern. A variety of student needs and situations are being met within the same degree structure. The BOG program seems, in conclusion, to have been successful not because of any one characteristic, but because of the way its many aspects fit together.

EVALUATION BY PROGRAM GRADUATES

A program established with a major objective of helping adult students overcome obstacles which had previously prevented them from earning a degree must be evaluated in large measure according to the extent to which this goal has been met. The feelings and comments of graduates about the program are, therefore, important indicators of its success. To solicit this information, a two-page questionnaire was sent to more than 1,500 students who had graduated from the BOG program through May, 1977. Of 1,522 forms which were mailed, 250 were undeliverable and 705 were returned, of which 686 (54 percent of the total delivered) contained data which could be coded and tabulated.

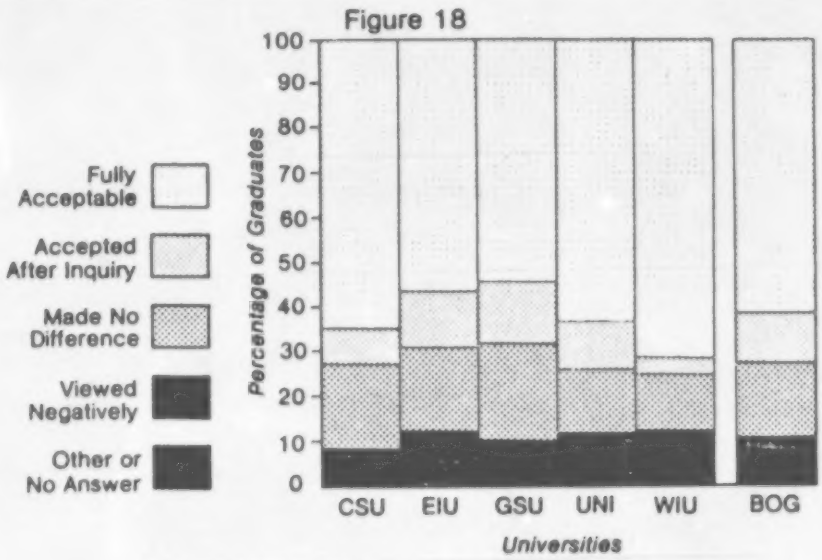
The graduates evaluated the extent to which they were satisfied with the BOG program. As highlighted in Figure 17, the overwhelming response was positive: 85 percent said they were either "satisfied"



or "fully satisfied"; another 11.8 percent had "mixed but mostly positive" feelings about the program, and only five graduates (less than 1 percent) regarded the degree as a "major disappointment." Thus the general finding is one of strong, broad client satisfaction.

Graduates also indicated the extent to which their employers accepted their degrees, with almost 72 percent reporting full acceptability either initially or after it was explained (see Figure 18).

Figure 18



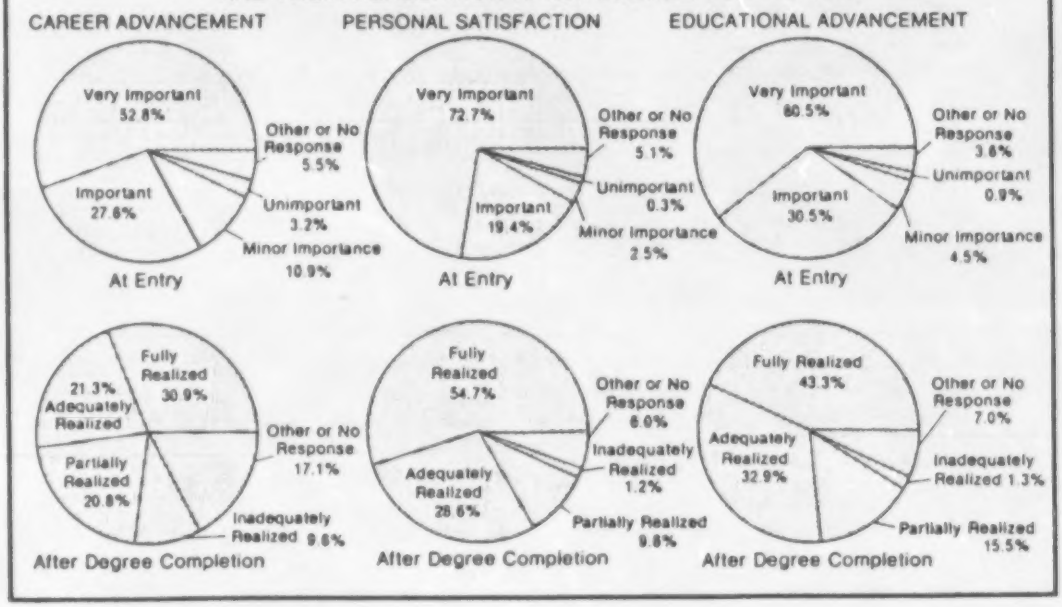
ACCEPTABILITY OF DEGREE TO GRADUATES' EMPLOYERS

Another 27 percent either left the space blank (suggesting that they were either unemployed or self-employed) or provided a non-committal response. Only 10 (1.5 percent) reported a negative view of the degree. Some caution needs to be exercised in evaluating these statistics, since the graduates were reporting their perceptions of other people's feelings. Many volunteered remarks suggesting that they were guessing. Nonetheless,

the data clearly fail to support a concern of some students that their employers may not respect a non-traditional degree. The number who encountered difficulty in having the degree accepted is so small that few problems are indicated.

BOG graduates also rated the importance to them of career advancement, personal satisfaction, and educational advancement at the time they entered the program and indicated the extent to which these goals had been realized upon graduation (see Figure 19).

Figure 19
GOALS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO PROGRAM
AND THEIR REALIZATION AFTER DEGREE COMPLETION



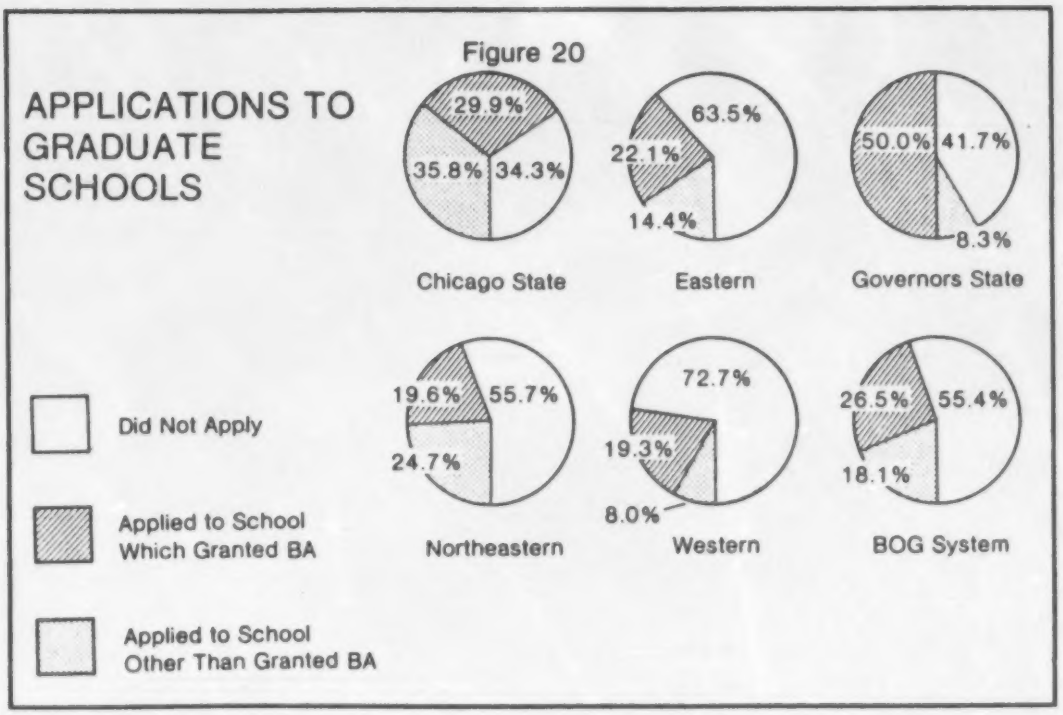
Personal satisfaction ranked highest in terms of goals at entry, with about 92 percent entering responses of "very important" or "important." 91 percent gave high ratings for educational advancement, and 80 percent for career advancement. When measuring the extent to which these goals had been met, the rankings followed the same pattern, with the highest positive response given for "personal satisfaction" and the lowest for

"career advancement." The spread is considerably greater than on goals at entry: 83 percent felt that their goals for personal satisfaction had been either fully or adequately realized, while 75 percent gave high responses for educational advancement, and only a slim majority (52.2 percent) felt that their career advancement goals had been fully or adequately realized. Some individuals may have had unrealistic expectations regarding the immediate impact of a college degree on their careers. For those who entered graduate school, a response such as "partially realized" may indicate the on-going nature of their education.

Determining the significance of these responses is difficult. For example, 30.9 percent of BOG graduates indicated that their career advancement goals were fully realized through the program. Is this to be interpreted as average, unusually high, or disappointingly low? Without comparable data from other student populations, it is impossible to say with certainty. Nevertheless, the small percentage indicating that their goals were "inadequately realized" clearly demonstrates that most graduates of the BOG program are satisfied with their experience.

Yet another method of measuring the acceptability of a degree is the success met by its graduates who wish to continue their education. Of the 686 graduates surveyed, 306 (44.6 percent) had applied to at least one advanced program, 34 to two and 10 to three. Figure 20 illustrates the proportions of graduates applying to advanced programs: 26.5 percent of BOG program graduates applied to the graduate college of the same Board of Governors university where they had received their degree. Governors State received the highest number of applications (83), followed by Northeastern Illinois (46), Eastern (40),

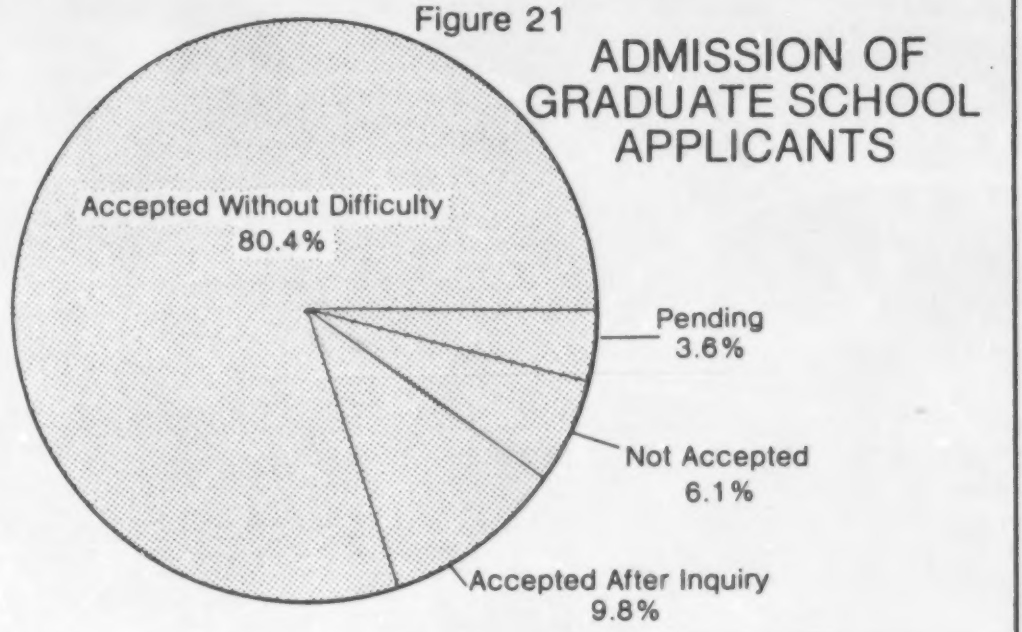
Figure 20



Chicago State (21), and Western (18). In addition, a total of approximately 60 graduate schools including medical and law schools received applications from BOG graduates. Those most frequently applied to were: University of Illinois (14), Northern Illinois (13), Roosevelt (10), Southern Illinois (8), De Paul (6) and Loyola (6).

A substantial percentage of graduate schools admitted the BOG graduates who applied (see Figure 21). Slightly more than 90 percent of all applications were approved. In 80.4 percent of cases students reported that they were accepted without difficulty, and 35 more applicants (9.8 percent) were accepted after some inquiry regarding the degree. Twenty-two applicants (6.1 percent) were rejected, but only six of them because of the BOG Degree. Even if all BOG institutions were deleted from the totals, the percentage of students accepted

Figure 21



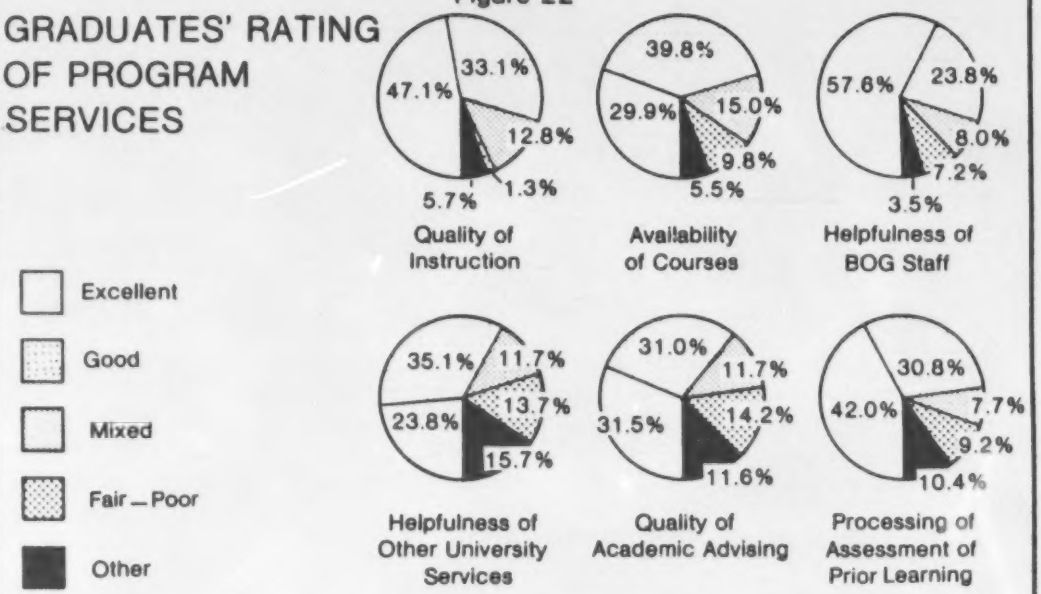
at various other graduate schools would be substantial enough that it can be safely concluded that the BOG Degree is a credential that is generally acceptable to a wide range of graduate institutions.

The last section of the questionnaire sent to graduates asked about the quality of service provided to enrolled students. Six questions gave graduates an opportunity to rate the availability of courses, quality of instruction, helpfulness of the BOG staff, helpfulness of other university services, quality of counseling and advising, and the processing of prior learning portfolios. In general, graduates exhibited a considerable amount of discrimination in answering the questionnaire and did not simply mark all items identically.

As shown in Figure 22, the highest levels of satisfaction, about

Figure 22

GRADUATES' RATING OF PROGRAM SERVICES



80 percent in the "excellent" and "good" categories, were recorded for the quality of instruction and the helpfulness of the BOG program staff. The latter received 10 percent more "excellent" responses than any other. One respondent of 686 rated the quality of instruction as "poor," and only eight other (1.2 percent) characterized it as "fair."

The smallest percentage of "excellent" and "good" evaluations were given to "helpfulness of other university services" (58.9 percent) and "quality of academic advising" (62.5 percent). These items also received the largest number of "fair" and "poor" ratings, approximately 14 percent each. Although some students complained about the difficulty in finding suitable classes, graduates ranked the "availability of courses" in the middle and do not appear to consider this as particularly troublesome.

The high ratings given to the faculty for the quality of instruction and to the BOG program staff for their overall helpfulness indicate that these jobs are being done well. Less favorable evaluations of academic advisement and the helpfulness of other university services suggest needed improvements. The results vary among institutions. Western was clearly above the system average for most questions, probably because fewer students enabled the Coordinator to provide more individualized service. Similarly Northeastern received more "fair" and "poor" ratings for academic advisement, undoubtedly because of heavy program enrollments and limited staff. Clearly the relationship between enrollments and staff size is an important determinant in providing good quality student services.

An open-ended question asked graduates to identify the best features of the Board of Governors program. About 45 percent noted the "granting of credit for prior learning," while 10 percent liked the "flexibility of degree requirements." Many graduates concluded that the best thing about the BOG program is its existence. Other positive features listed included "the opportunity to earn a degree while working" (7.4 percent), the "easy transfer of credit from other institutions" (6.1 percent) and a "reduction in the time required to complete a degree" (6.0 percent).

A number of graduates included extremely enthusiastic extended comments about the program, even though such endorsements had not been solicited. If any thread underlies the majority of these, it is an expression of gratitude that someone or some university has opened the doors to working adults and helped them earn that long-desired degree.

What makes these comments especially interesting is that adults have always had an opportunity to complete most college degrees; however, most did not see how they could fit into existing programs. The format of the BOG program communicates the idea that the university is concerned about the special needs of older students and is ready to help them with a program suited to an adult's life situation and experience. Quite possibly, this symbolic aspect of the program is one of its most important features.

BOG graduates were also given an opportunity to suggest aspects of the program which need improvement. Of the 686 responses, 179 (26.1 percent) either made no entry or entered remarks that did not suggest improvements. Ninety-nine more commented that the program is just fine the way it is. The remaining 408 (59.5 percent) suggested improvements, most frequently better advising, followed by better or speedier processing of portfolios, the availability of more courses, the inclusion of a major requirement, and the expansion of the size of the program. Graduates also suggested improvements in the general administration and coordination of the program, the operation of the transcripts and records offices, procedures for teacher certification, and cited negative faculty attitudes. A few felt that they had been left out of the mainstream of college life, but only a very few criticized the total program.

These suggestions come as no surprise to those who have been closely associated with the program. The adjustment of an academic institution to a new, older student body is a slow process with an anticipated time lag. Because of small staffs, providing adequate

advisement has been a constant problem; and no university has been able to meet the diverse needs of so many students in a uniformly satisfactory manner. The problems of portfolio evaluation, caused in part by inadequate staffing and the newness of the program, are well-known. If anything is surprising about the results of the graduate questionnaire, it is the strength of the positive responses and the mildness of the negative comments. Clearly, the BOG Degree Program has served most of its graduating clients well.

THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS PROGRAM

Imagine for a moment a typical adult student attempting to complete a college degree. He or she is about 35 years old, married, employed full time, and has already completed about two years of college work. The concerns of this would-be student are reflected in questions asked the university representative with whom he or she meets:

"Can I transfer all the credits I earned years ago or are all these credits lost?"

"Do I have to attend full-time?"

"Can I take classes in the evenings or on weekends?"

"What happens if I miss class or examinations because of my family or job responsibilities?"

"Will I have to take courses if I already know what is taught in them?"

"What will happen if I am transferred or have to move before I finish the degree?"

"Will I be accepted even though I did poorly in college years ago?"

"Can I take tests to earn credit for the things I already know?"

"Will someone help me plan my program?"

"Will I be able to compete with younger students in the classroom?"

Before January of 1973 the responses to such queries would undoubtedly have been so discouraging that only the most determined adult would attempt to finish a degree. The development of the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program changed the answers, however, and made it possible for five institutions of higher education within the Board of Governors system in Illinois to offer adults a program to meet their needs.

Overcoming the substantial problems confronting adults in completing a bachelor's degree requires commitment and flexibility on the part of educational administrators. The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program has cut through the tangle of restrictive rules and practices that complicate most admission procedures, impede or prevent the transfer of credit from other institutions, and unnecessarily penalize students who did poorly during their first try at college at a younger age. The BOG program embodies a concept of the bachelor's degree that is simple and readily understood, that can be completed within a reasonable time span, and that retains most traditional elements of undergraduate education. The major contribution of the program has been administrative rather than curricular: it has eliminated or modified the rules and procedures that have often deterred highly competent adult students from earning a bachelor's degree.

Five years ago the practice of awarding credit for what persons had learned independently, on-the-job, or through non-collegiate sponsored instruction was bold and innovative. Some faculty were extremely cautious about evaluating portfolios and seemingly doubted their own capacity to judge learning outcomes other than those produced by classroom attendance. Other professors were willing to trust their best professional judgment in an educational experiment. For half a decade faculty have shared their experiences, discussed their problems, and taken advantage of increasingly detailed and improved literature on the subject. What was once done with puzzlement and some confusion is now performed as confidently as grading final examinations or awarding course grades; and the practice has achieved a degree of consistency and professionalism that parallels faculty grading standards. The Board of Governors universities have built a broad base of solid experience in evaluating prio. experience that places them in the forefront of this growing national movement.

The Board of Governors program has demonstrated the value of utilizing several separate universities in a cooperative venture to provide improved educational services for people throughout the state. The Systemwide Steering Committee utilizes written guidelines which allow the program to grow and mature without compromising its basic principles for the sake of administrative convenience or adherence to traditional procedures. The Steering Committee and Campus Coordinators make certain that the program maintains high academic standards. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of five universities in completing their academic requirements, and the collective

experience and expertise of faculty and administrators throughout the system have proven valuable in solving numerous problems.

The public response to the Board of Governors program shows the extent to which this direct systemwide attention to the potential adult student was both timely and essential. Most graduates have found the program highly satisfactory, and many have provided spontaneous testimonials reflecting their gratitude at having been given the opportunity to realize the long-deferred dream of completing a bachelor's degree. "I have been waiting for a program like this for years," said one; "the BOG program helped me put it all together, " said another. Critical in achieving this success are the program's flexible delivery system and the unspoken but widely perceived message that Board of Governors universities care enough about adults to offer them an opportunity to earn a degree while maintaining their work and family responsibilities.

The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program provides a valuable model of what can be accomplished with commitment and sense of service to public need. It makes maximum use of institutional resources and encourages institutional cooperation. Its flexible design makes possible the development of limitless numbers of activities designed for specialized groups. In short, through the Board of Governors Degree Program the State of Illinois reaffirms its commitment to making educational resources available to adults who seek an opportunity to learn.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

The climate of American higher education has changed considerably since the Board of Governors program was instituted five years ago. Where innovation and experimentation were once encouraged, they are now sometimes challenged as greater emphasis is placed on basic skills and high academic standards. On the other hand, activities once considered boldly unconventional are now an accepted part of academic life. Where once colleges and universities found it difficult to accommodate all the students who wished to enroll, current trends point toward a steady reduction in the numbers of traditionally aged college students; thus post-secondary educators are suddenly more interested in adults. The Board of Governors program, like all educational pursuits, needs to be re-evaluated on a continuing basis, especially in the light of these changing conditions.

Moreover, five years of experience have demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of the Board of Governors program, which was inaugurated as an experiment laden with risk and possible failure. In general the program has proven highly successful, but recurrent problems noted by students and Coordinators deserve consideration and possible action. The following areas are worthy of study:

1. Adequate academic advisement is extremely important to the success of students enrolled in the Board of Governors program. This is an activity which requires greater attention and additional resources. Pre-admissions interviews, help in the development of suitable individual academic programs, assistance in preparing prior-experience portfolios, and a pre-graduation interview should be available to all students.

2. While many adults have enrolled in the Board of Governors program in the Chicago metropolitan area and in the regions adjacent to Western and Eastern, persons living in most other regions of the state have not participated in substantial numbers. Greater enrollment could be facilitated by the expanded use of independent study, media courses, and other instructional techniques designed to overcome distance or by the extension of the BOG Degree or comparable programs to other colleges and universities in Illinois.
3. Studies of current college curriculum materials should be undertaken to determine whether the curriculum is responsive to the abilities, needs, maturity, and life situations of older students. Quite possibly the development of new courses and curricular combinations will be necessary if adults are to be adequately served.
4. The value of a high-level Steering Committee during the period when the program was being established has been demonstrated. It is doubtful, however, whether vice presidents for academic affairs who have many other responsibilities can devote the time necessary to oversee such a program on a permanent basis. It is vital that the Steering Committee meet regularly to consider problems as they develop. To assure that this can occur, consideration should be given to reconstituting the composition of the Steering Committee or allowing its members to delegate their responsibilities to others.
5. The need to restrict admissions to the Board of Governors program to exclude unsuitable individuals who wish to take advantage of its flexible requirements has been a subject of continued debate. Establishing an arbitrary age-limit seems undesirable. Consideration

should be given to developing criteria and policies which authorize the Program Coordinator or some other appropriate individual to deny admissions to clearly unqualified persons. An appeal procedure should be provided.

6. The problem of students who enroll in the program and stop out or entirely abandon their efforts to earn a degree requires careful attention. Study is needed to determine the reasons for noncompletion and to take the necessary steps to increase graduation rates. Procedures should also be developed for identifying students who wish to become inactive or to withdraw from the program.

7. The provision that only passing grades be recorded on transcripts for BOG students is of continuing concern. Adults do sometimes face problems leading to failure which are beyond their control. On the other hand, this number is apparently small, and it burdens all students (whether they have utilized the procedure or not) to hold a transcript stating that only passing grades are recorded. Whether this provision penalizes more students than it helps is debatable, but other alternatives need to be explored. Perhaps unsatisfactory or failing grades could be recorded but not counted in computing the grade point average required for graduation.

8. The administrative guidelines relating to granting credit for prior learning lack detail. The possibility of more specific regulations related to the use of outside evaluators and appeal or review procedures should be considered.

9. The greater use of standardized credit recommendations should be encouraged. The American Council on Education's recommendations

related to military training should be utilized for the Board of Governors program at all universities, as should the recommendations of the American Council on Education and the University of the State of New York for instruction provided by noncollegiate institutions.[8] Company-sponsored educational programs in Illinois need to be examined for possible standard credit recommendations. Increased utilization of national and campus-developed proficiency examinations should be made in areas where portfolio assessment may be inappropriate. Moreover, the Steering Committee should work with the Coordinators to develop additional block credit awards for recognized professional certificates.

10. The fee charged for the evaluation of student portfolios should be substantially increased and the development of procedures for the regular payment of faculty members doing assessments should be considered.

11. Efforts are needed to review the forms used in collecting data about students and their programs and to devise new and more appropriate instruments where necessary in order to insure that detailed information is available both at the campus and system level and to make provision for periodic reports on the status of the program.

12. Cost-recovery methods for providing services to applicants from outside Illinois should be explored to determine if large numbers of students writing from all over the United States and foreign countries should be served by this program.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What began as a bold experiment in higher education five years ago is now a viable, established program serving thousands of adult students throughout the State of Illinois. No model for a multi-university program serving adult students existed when the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program was conceived. Today its success has led several other states to inaugurate similar activities, and the Illinois Board of Governors program is frequently compared favorably with the larger, better-financed, and more highly publicized external degree programs in New York and New Jersey. It is a leader in a national trend devoting greater attention to the education of persons beyond the usual age for attending college.

The students for whom the program was designed are, with few exceptions, those who have enrolled in substantial numbers. The majority of students in the program are well beyond the traditional age for attending college, much older than the statewide average for full or part-time undergraduates, employed on a full-time basis, and married. Minority groups, especially Blacks, are well represented. The younger adults are predominantly male, while women are better represented among older students. Almost 6,000 individuals from throughout the state have participated in the program, although the majority live within a short distance of a Board of Governors institution and only small numbers in other areas have been served. Both vocational and personal objectives motivated these individuals to enroll in the degree program.

Provisions which surmount the barriers traditionally preventing adults from completing undergraduate degree programs appeal to these students. Most have attended several colleges and universities, and enjoy the unlimited opportunity to apply these credits toward a degree. More than half of a typical student's academic program is composed of classes taken at other institutions. The flexible degree design enables adults to select courses and to design fields of specialization uniquely suited to their professional or educational needs. A major is allowed but not required. Especially outside the Chicago metropolitan area, the absence of an on-campus residency requirement and the small number of hours which must be earned at Board of Governors universities appeal to many students.

The procedures whereby adults may receive credit for what they have learned outside college or university classrooms constitute the single most attractive feature to most students. A fairly small percentage has used proficiency examinations, received credit for military experience and training, or utilized a standard credit award available to registered nurses. Many more have submitted portfolios detailing and documenting the skills and knowledge they have acquired in nonacademic settings. These are sent to faculty or other experts who evaluate them and may recommend an award of credit. The level of sophistication of students in preparing portfolios and of faculty in assessing them has steadily increased over the years, and the Board of Governors System is now one of the leading groups in a growing national movement.

The overwhelming response of students to the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program has been positive. Far greater numbers

of persons enrolled for the program than was anticipated, and more than three-quarters of graduates declared themselves "fully satisfied" or "satisfied" with their experience. Moreover, most employers of graduates found the degree acceptable, and very few graduates applying to graduate schools have experienced difficulties in admission. The educational and personal objectives which most students had upon enrolling in the program have been substantially realized upon graduation. The impact of earning a degree on graduates' career advancement was generally satisfactory.

The Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program demonstrates that a systemwide program operating at several widely separated university campuses and satellite centers can work. Uniform written guidelines specifying the procedures for admission, transfer of credit, classes, fees, and graduation requirements have been successfully implemented on all five campuses. The systemwide program Steering Committee oversees the operation of the program, makes certain that high academic standards are maintained, and responds to new or previously unanticipated opportunities.

Innovations involve certain inevitable risks, pose new challenges, and are subject to criticism, and the Board of Governors Degree Program is no exception. Its development required a sense of risk taking as well as a genuine concern for the needs of the public. The major contribution made by the program as an educational experiment has been administrative rather than curricular by facilitating entry to college and revising rules and procedures to aid citizens. Of no less importance was the symbolic message that the Board of Governors universities cared enough to provide adults with an opportunity to earn a college degree while maintaining work and family responsibilities. Again and again, adult students have commented: "I had been waiting for a program like this for years."

The Board of Governors Degree Program is now well known, relatively free of criticism, stable, and growing. As higher education looks to a future with diminishing numbers of younger students, this program provides a valuable model of what can be accomplished with a sense of commitment and service to the learning needs of the public. Moreover, the program began and continues to operate on modest budgets, maximizing the use of institutional resources, and at the same time enhancing inter-institutional cooperation. It has proved itself to be a flexible vehicle for an almost limitless number of specialized activities for clientele with particular needs. It has provided a great many good things for little money.

The State of Illinois has provided millions of dollars to support higher education. The typical student participating in the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program--the thirty-six-year-old, employed worker with a family--is the person who has carried much of the tax burden to support education. Many Board of Governors Degree students see their own children through college before enrolling at a university themselves. The State of Illinois could well reaffirm and expand its commitment of educational resources to serve older adult students who, as five years of experience have proven, eagerly respond to real opportunities to learn. This is what the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program is all about.

1. Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, Less Time, More Options: Education Beyond the High School (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1971) pp. 11-12, 19.

2. Frank Newman and Others, Report on Higher Education (Washington: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1971), pp. 4-11.

3. Commission on Non-Traditional Study, Diversity by Design (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974), p. xix.

4. Illinois Board of Higher Education, A Master Plan--Phase III (Springfield: Board of Higher Education, 1971), p. 13.

5. Information is based on Fall 1976 data contained in Illinois Board of Higher Education, Data Book on Illinois Higher Education (Springfield: Board of Higher Education, 1977).

6. See, for example, Gail Sheehy, Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976).

7. Warren W. Willinghan, Principles of Good Practice in Assessing Experiential Learning (Princeton, N.J.: CAEL, 1977).

8. American Council on Education, Guide to the Evaluation of Educational Experiences in the Armed Services, 76 (Washington: American Council on Education, 1976) and The National Guide to Credit Recommendations for Non-Collegiate Courses (Washington: American Council on Education, 1978). University of the State of New York, A Guide to Educational Programs in Noncollegiate Organizations (Albany: Office of Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction, 1977).